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Issued three times a year

Subscriptions:

€16 per year within Europe and the Middle East
\$30 per year to the USA
Individual copies 150 czk

Enquiries regarding subscriptions and articles to Journal@ibts.eu

This periodical is indexed in the *ATLA Religion Database*® and it is also included in the full-text *ATLASerials*® (*ATLAS*®) collection. Both are products of the American Theological Library Association, 300 S. Wacker Dr., Suite 2100, Chicago, IL 60606, USA
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This periodical is also abstracted in *Religious and Theological Abstracts*. Online access is available on EBSCO *Academic Search*™ *Complete* and *Religion & Philosophy Collection*™

ISSN 1804 – 6444 (on line)

ISSN 1213 – 1520 (print)

Registration Number: MK ČR E 10511

International Baptist Theological Seminary

of the European Baptist Federation, o.p.s.
Nad Habrovkou 3, Jenerálka, Praha 6, CZ 164 00, Czech Republic

IČO: 25741683

Produced by the IBTS Journal Team



Institute of Baptist and Anabaptist Studies
and Institute of Systematic Study of Contextual Theologies
under the auspices of
the International Baptist Theological Study Centre, Amsterdam
in partnership with the Theology Faculty of VU University,
Amsterdam

IBTS Hughey Lectures, November 3, 2014 and Conference on Convictional Theologies, November 4-6, 2014

The Hughey Lectures will be delivered by Dr Curtis Freeman, Director and Research Professor at the Baptist House, Duke University. The title of the lectures is **Undomesticated Dissent**.

Lecture 1: The Dissenting Conscience
Lecture 2: The Dissenting Church
Lecture 3: The Dissenting Christ

Prof Dr Freeman will examine these themes by looking at the Canon of Dissent in English Protestantism. Specifically, he will look at the way this canon has been memorialized in Bunhill Fields, the Dissenter burial grounds in London. By looking at the three memorials to three great voices of dissent in the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries, John Bunyan, Daniel Defoe, and William Blake, he will explore how they give voice to these major themes of Dissenters.



The Hughey Lectures will be followed by the **Conference on Convictional Theologies** which will celebrate 90 years of James Wm McClendon's life witness and theological thought. It will engage in different streams of convictional theologising of Baptists, Mennonites, and other adherents of the Radical Reformation. Guided by the titles of McClendon's three-volume Systematic Theology, the conference will be organised along the themes of Ethics, Doctrine, and Witness.

Call for papers: until May 30, 2014, to be sent to Parushev@ibts.eu

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Editorial

This issue inaugurates the fifteenth volume of the *Journal of European Baptist Studies*, which is produced by the academic team at the International Baptist Theological Study Centre located in Amsterdam, in co-operation with a network of senior and younger scholars across the Baptist communities of the European Baptist Federation and beyond. Essays presented in this issue are an assorted collection of contributions and represent an integrative approach to theologising by bringing insights from biblical, historical and applied theological perspectives.

Dr Ian Randall engages with the story of Charles Raven – an outstanding theologian and Church of England preacher of the first half of the twentieth century. A respected Cambridge academic, he was known for his deep evangelical spirituality and longstanding interest in matters of science and faith. Randall skilfully uncovers a less well known passion of Raven – his commitment to mission and discipleship in a missional community of the Spirit. Raven engaged in mission in many ways and no less by insistence on developing ‘ordinary’ theology for and by the ministers of the church – a truly missional theologian.

Dr Mark Braverman – a Jewish-Christian activist – takes a close look at the *Kairos* movement as a vehicle for justice, peace and liberation. Tracing the emergence of the movement from within anti-apartheid struggles in South Africa, he presents an extensive theological assessment of the movement’s spread and development and its relevance, particularly to the volatile situation in the Holy Land in response to the Palestinian call for solidarity and liberation.

Taking a lead from a real encounter, Dr Marion Carson offers an interesting reflection on what role Scripture should play in the everyday lives of Christian disciples and within a community of disciples. She insists that Christian discipleship cannot be reduced to a matter of adherence to law or principle. Mature biblical hermeneutics for daily living points towards the centrality of love and the need for wisdom in discipleship under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

For fourteen years this journal has been faithfully served in the task of sub-editing by Mrs Denise Jones and in editing, for the most part, by the former Rector of IBTS – The Revd Dr Keith Jones. The Editorial Board expresses deep gratitude for their faithful commitment to the mission of the journal.

The Revd Doc Dr Parush R Parushev
Vice-Rector, IBTS Centre in Amsterdam

‘The living presence of Christ’: Charles Raven (1885-1964), a missional theologian¹

Ian M Randall

Charles Raven was an outstanding theologian and preacher of the first half of the twentieth century. He was born on 4 July 1885 in Paddington, London, to John Raven, a barrister, and his wife Alice. In 1904 Charles Raven began what was to be a long association with Cambridge, having gained a scholarship at Gonville and Caius College. As F.W. Dillistone, his biographer, notes, he started writing as an undergraduate and already gave attention to what would be his life-long interest in evolution.² After a year and a half away from Cambridge following graduation, Raven returned in 1910 to academic life, as Lecturer in Divinity, Fellow and Dean of Emmanuel College, Cambridge. From 1914 to 1932 his ministries included military chaplaincy during the First World War, local parish ministry in Surrey, and eight years at Liverpool Cathedral. In 1932 Raven was elected Regius Professor of Divinity in Cambridge and he remained in that post until retirement in 1950. He was also Master of Christ’s College, Cambridge, from 1939 to 1950. Raven was a prolific writer and is particularly known for his work on science and faith. His convictions about this are summed up in a book he produced in 1936, *Evolution and the Christian Concept of God*. Speaking of God working in the world, he wrote: ‘For myself I believe that the scientific movement and its research into the evolutionary process are a contribution of quite priceless value to religion.’³ I have had a long-lasting interest in Raven, and in this study I will look at Raven’s commitment to mission, a topic which has not been examined before.

Raven’s life: ‘to be of any use’

Charles Raven’s mother was a devout church-goer, but Christianity had little impact on Charles’ early life. During his first eighteen months as a student at Cambridge, he later recalled, he was ‘a pure pagan’, but over two terms from January 1906 Raven experienced, as he put it, the unveiling of ‘the eternal reality, beyond and behind the sense of things’, and he felt that divine

¹ I am indebted to IBTS and Spurgeon’s College for the opportunity I have had to present this material at research seminars, reflecting on Charles Raven fifty years after his death.

² F.W. Dillistone, *Charles Raven: Naturalist, Historian, Theologian* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1975), p. 43.

³ C.E. Raven, *Evolution and the Christian Concept of God* (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), pp. 21-22. This book is based on lectures by Raven at Durham University.

reality ‘had enfolded me into union with itself’. He connected this with what William Wordsworth and the mystics had made familiar.⁴ He transferred his university studies from Classics to Divinity, concentrating on the Church Fathers, modern doctrine and the history and philosophy of religion. Probably the greatest influence on Raven was H.M. Gwatkin, Professor of Ecclesiastical History. ‘His learning, enthusiasm and generosity’, Raven wrote later, ‘were an inspiration.’⁵ After he completed his undergraduate studies in 1908, with a double first class honours, there were suggestions of continued study in Germany, but Raven had a conviction that ‘if I was ever going to be of any use in the world I must break away from the public school and university tradition and get a wider experience’.⁶ His vision for mission was already emerging.

In pursuit of his aspiration, Raven became Assistant Secretary for Secondary Education in Liverpool. He began to find Christian fellowship with Nonconformists as well as Anglicans, and especially in interdenominational youth groups. He delivered his first religious address in the hall of a Congregational Church.⁷ Raven’s encounter with social inequality in Liverpool fostered what would be a major interest in Christian Socialism. His first significant historical book was *Christian Socialism, 1848-1854* (1920).⁸ Although Raven’s vision of the Christian community was broadened in Liverpool, he nevertheless decided to apply for ordination in the Church of England, believing that this was where he could be ‘of use’. He was anticipating local parish work, but he was offered the position of Dean of Emmanuel College, Cambridge. He was ordained in Ely Cathedral in Advent 1909 and began as Lecturer in Divinity and Dean of Emmanuel in January 1910, at age twenty-four. As a lecturer, Raven soon demonstrated his ability and magnetism as a communicator. For many who heard him lecture in Cambridge - often without notes - he was at heart a preacher. He was remembered as ‘spell-binding’.⁹ Also in 1910, Raven married Margaret (always known as Bee) Buchanan Wollaston. The couple had four children – Mary, Betty, John and Margaret. Charles and Bee were married for thirty-four years and her unexpected death was shattering for Charles. He married

⁴ C.E. Raven, *A Wanderer’s Way* (London: Hopkinson, 1928), pp. 46-7. Prior to this, he had an experience of ecstasy in the Lake District, in August 1905. See C.E. Raven, *Musings and Memories* (London: Hopkinson, 1931), p. 148.

⁵ C.E. Raven, *Apollinarianism: An Essay on the Christology of the Early Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1923), preface.

⁶ Raven, *Wanderer’s Way*, pp. 78-9.

⁷ Dillistone, *Raven*, p. 60. Dillistone refers to Raven’s warm contacts with ‘sectarian groups’, presumably Nonconformists.

⁸ C.E. Raven, *Christian Socialism, 1848-1854* (London: Macmillan, 1920). This book was the first to examine this movement historically.

⁹ Dillistone, *Raven*, pp. 74-5; F.H.C. Butler, ‘Charles Earle Raven’, *The British Journal for the History of Science*, Vol. 2, Issue 3 (June 1965), pp. 254-5.

During the First World War, Raven taught at Tonbridge School, Kent, and volunteered as an army chaplain in France. While in Tonbridge he was committed to seeking to communicate the Christian faith to people he met, and talks he gave appeared in 1916 as a book, *What think ye of Christ?* Introducing these talks, he suggested very few Christians could ‘combine the duty of study with the care of souls’. Local ministers, Raven suggested, tended to leave Christian doctrine to professors of theology, but although academics were ‘willing enough, perhaps too willing, to elaborate new theologies’, they did not ask about any re-statement of doctrine: ‘Does it save souls?’¹¹ The aim of being intellectually credible and also communicable – the aim of doing what would now be called ‘ordinary theology’ – was to drive Raven. He took a further step in seeking to be useful in mission by becoming an army chaplain in April 1917. Gary Sheffield, in a study of First World War chaplains, argues that as a chaplain Raven ‘failed to accommodate himself to the society in which he found himself’.¹² However, this does not do justice to Raven’s experiences. Raven was pleased when soldiers from a Free Church background appreciated his preaching.¹³ Other soldiers asked Raven to celebrate Holy Communion when he was visiting injured men.¹⁴ It is notable that Raven ‘chose to be drafted to a battalion on the Western Front rather than to a hospital post behind the lines’.¹⁵

After the war Raven returned to Emmanuel, before becoming rector of Bletchingley, Surrey, in 1920. In the same year he was appointed a chaplain to the King. The time at Bletchingley was not a great success: Raven was often occupied outside the parish. He was involved in country-wide missions, especially with Albert David, who became bishop of Liverpool.¹⁶ Raven was also busy with theological writing and lecturing. He was awarded a Cambridge DD for his ground-breaking study of early church Apollinarian thinking, published in 1923. He made connections with Trinity College, Dublin, and enjoyed telling the story of a Dublin visit when he was due to

¹¹ C.E. Raven, *What think ye of Christ?* (London: MacMillan & Co., 1916), pp. xii-xiii; cf. Dillstone, *Raven*, pp. 78-81.

¹³ Charles Raven to S.W. Burgess, 21 May 1917. Christ's College, Cambridge, War Lists (WWI): Charles Raven's letters from the Western Front, 1917-1918. Box 218. Typescript, edited by J. Lipscomb, given by Mrs. Faith Raven, Docwra's Manor, Shepreth. Burgess was the manager of Lloyd's Bank, High Street, Tonbridge. I am grateful to Christ's College for permission to use Raven material.

¹⁵ John Lipscomb, ed., *Charles Raven: Letters from the Western Front, 1917-1918* (Privately Printed, 2007), p. 3.

¹⁶ 'The New Bishop of Liverpool: Dr. David, Former Head Master of Rugby', *The Manchester Guardian*, 27 July 1923, p. 11. Dillistone, *Raven*, p. 98.

preach the University sermon. Before the event the University received a telegram, signed Raven, saying 'Sorry cannot deliver the goods on time'. There were hurried attempts to find a substitute preacher. But Raven turned up. It transpired that the message was from a seed firm - named Raven.¹⁷ Another of Raven's involvements in the early 1920s was in planning the Conference on Christian Politics, Economics and Citizenship (COPEC), which drew together 1,500 leaders in church and society in 1924 in Birmingham. Linda Parker argues that Raven and other World War I chaplains had a 'high profile in social issues in the 1920s' and she notes how Raven was a 'prime mover' in the organisation of COPEC.¹⁸

A change of ministry to one better suited to Raven's abilities was made possible in 1924 by his friend Albert David. Raven became canon at the new Liverpool Cathedral, working until 1932 with David and with F.W. Dwelly, who had been drawn to ministry through All Souls Church, Langham Place, London.¹⁹ Raven, whose stimulating style of lecturing was appreciated, was given the task of training newly ordained clergy (Michael Ramsey, later Archbishop of Canterbury, was one of them), in a scheme which was an innovation for the Church of England. Raven applauded Albert David's concern 'to bring unity and inspiration to his clergy in order to prepare them for evangelism', and planned a course of studies 'centred upon the work of the Spirit in nature and history, in Scripture and the Church'. This led to a movement, 'The Way of Renewal'.²⁰ Raven continued his writing and wider lecturing - at Harvard University in 1926 and Union Theological Seminary, New York, in 1930 - but mission in Liverpool was a challenge he relished. He pioneered a relatively informal 8.30 Sunday evening service, which attracted large numbers of mainly young people. The stated aim was to 'awaken experience of God'.²¹ Raven and Dwelly were the main preachers, but Raven also looked out for visiting speakers who could communicate well. In 1925 he wrote to his friend T.R. Glover, the Public Orator of Cambridge University and the author of the hugely popular *Jesus of History* (1917), inviting him to speak. Raven assured Glover, who was a Baptist, that he should feel free to 'pray and preach as you will. It is an effort to create a new tradition & your help is urgently needed'. He wanted Glover to stay with the Raven family and said that they would 'not forgive you easily' if this did not happen.²² Raven appreciated teamwork in mission.

¹⁷ Dillistone, *Raven*, p. 91.

¹⁸ Linda Parker, "'Shell-Shocked Prophets': Anglican Army Chaplains and Post-War Reform in the Church of England", in Snape and Madigan, eds., *Clergy in Khaki*, p. 192.

¹⁹ Peter Kennerley, *Frederick William Dwelly: First Dean of Liverpool* (Lancaster: Carnegie, 2004).

²⁰ C.E. Raven, *Good News of God* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1943), p. 103.

²¹ C.E. Raven, *Liverpool Cathedral* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 24.

²² C.E. Raven to T.R. Glover, 11 June 1925, in Glover Collection, St John's College, Cambridge. Glover/7/4/41. I am grateful to St John's College for permission to use this collection.

In 1932, to his own surprise, Raven was elected to the Regius Chair of Divinity at Cambridge. Apart from *Apollinarianism* (1923), the two major books he had published at that point were *The Creator Spirit* (1927) and *Jesus and the Gospel of Love* (1931), neither of which followed standard academic theological approaches. Raven wrote to his friend Glover about the election: ‘How they dared to do it, I can’t imagine: how I shall face the prospect, I can hardly conceive.’ He looked forward to ‘the joy of renewed comradeship’ with Glover, and concluded, ‘you’ll have to help me to rub up my scholarship.’²³ Typically, Raven did not take himself too seriously. Raven became a Fellow of Christ’s College and was elected College Master.²⁴ After World War II, Raven played a distinguished role as Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge University. One outstanding event was the Queen becoming the first woman to receive an honorary degree from the University. Raven conferred the honour. From 1950 he travelled extensively, lecturing and preaching. Visits included the USA, Canada, Australia, Russia and India. He reported on India that ‘my week at Bangalore was almost the most interesting of the whole experience’. He enthused about the United Theological College, Bangalore, as ‘quite excellent’ in scholarship and corporate life.²⁵ Raven maintained theological involvements up to his death. His last sermon (delivered in 1964 in Oxford) found him still wrestling with faith and science. Arthur Peacocke, a scientist in Oxford who heard the sermon, described how Raven ‘expressed with characteristic eloquence his vision of the unity of Christian insight and aspiration with a perspective on the cosmos that was deeply informed by the natural sciences and above all that of evolution.’²⁶ Raven was consistently committed to seeking to be useful.

Raven’s spirituality: ‘the living presence of Christ’

Charles Raven went to Cambridge as a religious sceptic, but the lives of one or two Christian friends began to impress and influence him. Awareness of a divine dimension led to Raven becoming a lay student of theology. Raven began to study St Paul’s letter to the Romans, which, he said, ‘opened my eyes to the true significance of faith’, and he added that ‘a year’s solid reading of Church history and Patristic theology gave me proof of the efficacy of that faith in action in the lives of the saints’.²⁷ Raven read about Paul being transformed by Christ, but Raven’s own life had not yet been

²³ Raven to Glover, 29 April 1932. Glover/9/3/34.

²⁴ C.P. Snow wrote about this: C.P. Snow, *The Masters* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1951).

²⁵ Charles Raven to Leslie Brown, 4 August 1956. Letter in the possession of Faith Raven, Docwra’s Manor. I am grateful to Faith Raven, Charles’ daughter-in-law, for her assistance.

²⁶ Arthur Peacocke, *Evolution: The Disguised Friend of Faith?* (West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Press, 2004), p. 34.

²⁷ Raven, *What think ye of Christ?*, p. xvii

affected in that way. Deeper ‘spiritual experience’, to use Raven’s own term in his autobiographical *Wanderer’s Way*, specifically experience of Jesus, came in 1909 through a visit to a friend who was an Anglican curate in Stoke-on-Trent. Raven’s friend was ill, but what Raven encountered ‘in the midst of the furnace’ of suffering, was Jesus, ‘alive and present to my friend as he had been to the eleven in the upper room’. Raven continued:

I had studied the evidence for the resurrection with an unbeliever’s critical scrutiny and had been persuaded of its validity but not of its consequences. Now I knew. It was not a dream for Saul of Tarsus, nor for a multitude of disciples through the ages. It was no longer a dream for me: for here was the reality of it. Such is a summary of the crucial event in my life.²⁸

For Raven, ‘the overwhelming conviction which the experience of His presence brought’ had grown, ‘if not stronger at least more vivid with the years’.²⁹

Although Raven has been classified as a theological Modernist,³⁰ I want to argue that this is a mistake and that Raven’s experience and outlook point to his spirituality as evangelical. David Bebbington’s characterisation of evangelicalism has been widely accepted. He sees the features of the evangelical movement as an emphasis on conversion, the Bible, the cross of Christ and active service.³¹ The first element was clearly present in Raven. In *Good News of God*, comprising eight letters written in 1943, Raven recalled: ‘I was myself “converted” – the old term is alone fit to describe what happened; and the process of transformation, studied in Paul’s case, began to take place in me.’ He spoke of ‘(a) vivid consciousness of the living presence of Christ, an intense and releasing devotion to Him... a resolve to let this experience control all my activities, a desire to share it with others’. Raven affirmed that ‘I am more sure of it as a thing not only real in itself but abiding and most effective in its results than I am of any other event in my life’. He also talked of assurance of salvation, citing ‘I know whom I have believed’, from 2 Timothy 1:2. Raven commented: ‘I have no right to accept these words, but I can’t help doing so.’³² The value which Raven placed on conversion locates his experience within the evangelical stream of Christian spirituality.³³

An emphasis on the Bible was also a constant element in Raven’s thinking. The biblical writers to whom he referred most often were John and

²⁸ Raven, *Wanderer’s Way*, p. 71.

²⁹ Raven, *Wanderer’s Way*, p. 156.

³⁰ Peter J. Bowler, *Reconciling Science and Religion: The Debate in Early Twentieth-Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), pp. 277-86, takes this view.

³¹ D.W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 2-17.

³² Raven, *Good News of God*, pp. 70-73.

³³ I.M. Randall, *What a Friend we have in Jesus* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2005), pp. 25-41.

Paul. In *What think ye of Christ?* Raven took issue with the common trend in New Testament scholarship to attribute a second century date to John's Gospel. Raven argued that this was inconceivable if the witness of Irenaeus was taken seriously. Raven found in John's Gospel a convincing portrait of Jesus, written by a disciple and close friend, one who saw in Jesus 'the lineaments of the eternal Christ'. The invitation Raven gave, drawing from John, was to a Christocentric faith which found in Christ 'the supreme revelation of God' to humanity. 'For us', Raven stated simply, 'Jesus is God'.³⁴ The value Raven placed on Paul's writings was evident in the eight letters Raven wrote in 1943 (written over ten days while Raven was involved in a Mission at University College, Bangor), which were addressed to his friend Henry Hart, Dean of Queen's College, Cambridge, and expressed many of Raven's deepest feelings. The scheme of the letters was derived from the first eight chapters of Romans. Raven affirmed: 'The study of this great gospel first gave me an understanding of Christianity: its exposition has been my constant theme for over thirty years'.³⁵ For Raven, his own experiences evoked in him a testimony, following Paul, that Christ 'is God's power, unconfined by ecclesiastical barriers, manifested to those who have eyes to see'.³⁶

The cross of Christ, too, was crucial for Raven. He dealt with this theme in 1925 in *Our Salvation*, which contained addresses on the atonement, and in 1931, in one of his most substantial theological books, *Jesus and the Gospel of Love*. Raven spoke about the atonement in these terms: 'What Jesus did is objective: so far the old theories of Atonement are right... But that is not all. Our acceptance of it involves an identification with Christ: what is objective must become subjective. It is here that the old theories, and the practice and claims of the Church have fallen short.' He argued that 'we must ourselves share to the full in His redemptive work, taking up the Cross, not metaphorically or by any vicarious sacrifice, but literally dying with Him to self and in Him living to reconcile the world unto God'.³⁷ Also in 1931, Raven voiced some criticism of a book his friend Glover had produced which dealt with the atonement but which Raven felt was unclear in its Christology. Glover's book, *Fundamentals*, covered: Sin, Punishment, Repentance, Conversion, Salvation, Atonement, Justification and Sanctification. On the atonement, Glover said that the term had no standard meaning in the Bible and in the popular sense was hardly found in

³⁴ Raven, *What think ye of Christ?*, pp. 125, 133, 194.

³⁵ Raven, *Good News of God*, p. 5. Raven's book provoked a reply from his friend Franz Hildebrandt, in *This is the Message* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1944). Hildebrandt was a Lutheran, part of the Confessing Church.

³⁶ Raven, *Good News of God*, p. 13.

³⁷ C.E. Raven, *Jesus and the Gospel of Love* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1931), p. 446. The book came out of lectures delivered in the University of Glasgow. See also C.E. Raven, *Our Salvation* (London: Hopkinson & Co., 1925).

the New Testament. There were strong protests about this view from some Baptists and there could have been denominational division, but Percy Evans, the Principal of Spurgeon's College, London, was able to bring reconciliation within the Baptist community.³⁸ Raven was certainly concerned, as he put it in 1939, to 'hold fast to the great tradition of the preaching of the Cross'.³⁹ He saw this tradition beginning with St Paul and was happy to write to Glover in 1940 to say that what Glover had been drafting on St Paul (and had given Raven to look at) had been a 'joy to read'.⁴⁰

The fourth element in evangelical spirituality, activism, was a notable feature of Raven's life. Following his undergraduate period, his early experiences in Liverpool were crucial, as he saw what he termed the 'vital and present effects' of the 'living Jesus'.⁴¹ It was in this period that he pondered his own future service. His reading of early church history had led him to think that many developments in the church of the early centuries - bishops, liturgies, forms of prayer, creeds - were 'necessary and useful' but that the real life of the church consisted in 'love and glad serving'. This was the life Raven was discovering and he began to ponder whether he might find 'a whole-time ministry' of this kind.⁴² This determinedly practical perspective on spirituality was a mark of Raven's approach. In an essay in 1923 in a book looking at the theme 'Catholic and Reformed', Raven contended that the church had a 'fundamental duty of evangelism' and he lamented that theologians were concentrating on 'minute' issues connected with 'the linguistic and textual problems of the Scriptures... as if a detailed study of the authorship of Isaiah or of the manuscript evidence for a few verses in the Gospels' helped anyone 'to see God or to preach Christ'.⁴³ For Raven an outstanding exemplar of practical Christianity was F.D. Maurice, one of the leaders of the nineteenth-century Christian Socialist movement. Raven appreciated Maurice's call to people 'to recognise in all relationships of life their unity in Christ with God and one another'.⁴⁴ He argued that Maurice 'set on foot three great movements' - higher education for women, co-operation in industry, and greater educational opportunities for working-class people.⁴⁵ Raven's own associations were with the broader or 'liberal'

³⁸ T.R. Glover, *Fundamentals* (London: Baptist Union, 1931), p. 23. For the controversy, see K.W. Clements, *Lovers of Discord: Twentieth-Century Theological Controversies in England* (London: SPCK, 1988), pp. 120-4.

³⁹ *Cromer Convention Chronicle* (London: Cromer Convention, 1939), pp. 45-6.

⁴⁰ C.E. Raven to T.R. Glover, 22 May 1940, St John's College, Cambridge. Glover /11/4/9.

⁴¹ Raven, *What think ye of Christ?*, p. xvii

⁴² Raven, *Wanderer's Way*, pp. 89-90.

⁴³ C.E. Raven, 'The New Reformation', in William Cox, ed., *Anglican Essays* (New York: Macmillan, 1923), pp. 250, 263.

⁴⁴ Raven, *Jesus and the Gospel of Love*, pp. 409-10. Raven refers to his own *Christian Socialism*, pp. 75-90.

⁴⁵ Raven, *Jesus and the Gospel of Love*, p. 410.

evangelical movement which grew rapidly in the Church of England from the early twentieth century to the 1930s.⁴⁶ Raven saw himself as ‘liberal’, concerned for a reasonable faith which could make a difference as it was spoken about and lived out in the world.

Science and faith: theology ‘congruous with modern evolutionary theories’

From boyhood Raven had what was to be a life-long love of nature and of birds, and he wrote three books on ornithology in the 1920s, the first his widely acclaimed *In Praise of Birds*.⁴⁷ He was a pioneer bird photographer. He also became a leading expert on wild flowers, moths and butterflies. Few – if any – of his contemporaries had the extraordinarily detailed knowledge he gained through observation, collection, sketching and photography. As a royal chaplain, Raven’s most memorable conversations with King George V were not about theology but ornithology.⁴⁸ In the 1950s Raven was President of the Botanical Society of the British Isles. Raven looked back to a day in 1927 ‘when the pulling together of my scientific and religious interests was accomplished’. He had observed the natural world with curiosity, but now he saw ‘a world alive, transparent, sacramental, the work of God, the object of His love, the body of His indwelling’.⁴⁹ Charles’ son, John, who became a Fellow of King’s College, Cambridge, suggested to Charles in 1942 that they co-produce a ‘collection of essays and illustrations’ of plants. Seventy years later a beautiful book, containing essays and splendid paintings of wild flowers by Charles and John was published. They painted over 2,000 species of wild flowers.⁵⁰ Theologically, Raven argued in *The Gospel and the Church* (1939), there had been a misguided renunciation of nature by Christians which was untrue to the Old Testament, Jesus’ teaching, the outlook of Paul and the Apostolic Church.⁵¹ He spoke of Jesus’ ‘insistence upon the loving care of the Creator’.⁵²

But Raven’s interest in science and faith ranged more widely. *The Creator Spirit*, in 1927, was Raven’s first major study addressing issues that had confronted him through his wide reading of developments in biology and

⁴⁶ See I.M. Randall, “‘The Truth shall Make you Free’: The Growth of the Anglican Evangelical Group Movement”, *Anglican and Episcopal History*, Vol. LXV, No.3 (1996), pp. 314-56. The movement declined after the Second World War.

⁴⁷ C.E. Raven, *In Praise of Birds* (London: Hopkinson, 1925); *The Ramblings of a Bird Lover* (London: Hopkinson, 1927); *Bird Haunts and Bird Behaviour* (London: Hopkinson, 1929).

⁴⁸ I.T. Ramsey, ‘Charles Earle Raven’, *Proceedings of the British Academy*, Vol. 51 (1965), p. 472.

⁴⁹ Raven, *Good News of God*, p. 49.

⁵⁰ Charles and John Raven, with H.J. Noltie, ed., *Wild Flowers: A Sketchbook* (Edinburgh: Royal Botanic Gardens, 2012). I am grateful to Faith Raven, the widow of John Raven, for this book.

⁵¹ C.E. Raven, *The Gospel and the Church: A Study of Distortion and its Remedy* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1939), p. 89.

⁵² Raven, *Gospel and Church*, pp. 172-3.

psychology. Raven paid tribute to the work of scientists and philosophers such as Lloyd Morgan, J.G. Adami and Joseph Needham. The book included an appendix on biochemistry and mental phenomena by Needham, whom Raven knew in Cambridge. Raven's view was that theologians had not grappled with the contemporary challenges posed for Christian thought. He hoped to formulate a 'Christ-centred view of the Universe in such a wise as to heal the breach between science and religion'.⁵³ In pursuing his theme of integration, especially in relation to evolution and God's activity, Raven proposed that 'woven into the very woof and warp of the universe is the pattern of the Cross' and in relating this to the Spirit he added that 'Nature is baptised in the Spirit of Jesus'.⁵⁴ Peter Bowler sees *Creator Spirit* as Raven's most original contribution to the new natural theology.⁵⁵ Giving a lecture in 1954, Raven spoke of how St Paul wrote (in Romans 8) of the 'incompleteness and frustration of the creative process' and saw this as 'the prelude to the manifestation of the family of God'. For Raven, Paul was drawing a picture that was 'congruous with modern evolutionary theories'. Raven argued for this understanding as against 'the randomness of the Neo-Darwinians or the mechanistic analogies of Dr Paley'.⁵⁶ For Raven, mission had to deal with scientific issues.

Raven had developed an early opposition to genetic determinism, and argued that if 'our struggles and hard-won virtues have no effect whatever upon the course of development' then to see God as 'in any real sense Father is impossible'.⁵⁷ Writing in 1918, Raven argued that God had not brought this world into being as 'a marionette show'. Raven was interested in the work of Henri Bergson and borrowed a metaphor from him: God as Father was like an artist deciding to create a picture; God the Son was the design on which the work was modelled; and the Holy Spirit was the creative energy in the artist that created the picture.⁵⁸ Raven also drew from the thinking of Teilhard de Chardin, a French Roman Catholic philosopher who died in 1955. In 1962, in the last book Raven wrote on science and religion, he spoke of Teilhard and Karl Barth as contemporaries who responded to their times in very different ways. Barth emphasised - Raven claimed - the 'sin and folly' of humanity and the 'otherness' of God, while (for Raven) Teilhard saw not two opposing worlds, but one, in which there was a single evolutionary story. Raven was saddened that 'the Protestant world had

⁵³ C.E. Raven, *The Creator Spirit* (London: Hopkinson, 1927), p. vii. This work is taken from the Hulsean Lectures, Cambridge, 1926-7; and the Noble Lectures, at Harvard, 1926.

⁵⁴ Raven, *Creator Spirit*, p. 124.

⁵⁵ Bowler, *Reconciling Science and Religion*, p. 279.

⁵⁶ C.E. Raven, *Organic Design: A Study of Scientific Thought from Ray to Paley* (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), p. 14.

⁵⁷ Raven, *Wanderer's Way*, p. 62.

⁵⁸ C.E. Raven 'The Holy Spirit' in C.H.S. Matthews, ed., *Faith and Freedom* (London: MacMillan, 1918), pp. 247-8.

enthroned Barth while the Vatican exiled... Teilhard'.⁵⁹ Raven lamented the paucity of helpful books on science and faith. When Bryan Green, a leading evangelist, wrote to Raven in 1949 asking for books to answer a 'scientific humanist's position', Raven replied that it was 'tragic' how little could be recommended.⁶⁰

It was probably as a historian of science that Raven made his greatest contribution to science and faith. Raven was fascinated by the work of the seventeenth-century Cambridge Platonists, finding in them outstanding examples of a 'synthetic philosophy',⁶¹ and he examined in his *John Ray, Naturalist: His Life and Works* (1942) the way in which Ray mediated their views. Ray, who was a Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, studied in *The Wisdom of God Manifested in the Works of Creation* (1691) the form and function of adaptation in nature, and Raven argued that this book, more than any other, 'initiated the true adventure of modern science'. It was, he considered, the ancestor of Darwin's *Origin of Species*.⁶² Ian Ramsey, whose work in the field of science and theology drew from Raven, noted that John Ray was a figure 'whose deepest loves and concerns were shared by Raven in full measure'.⁶³ Raven's found much to admire in this pioneering figure - the son of a blacksmith, then a Cambridge academic, and later a Nonconformist. Raven addressed the way Ray had been overshadowed, noting that Ray was 'imitated, and extensively plagiarised, by Paley in his famous *Natural Theology*'.⁶⁴ Raven's research into Ray, and into seventeenth-century botanical studies more widely, was exhaustive. Among those he consulted in Cambridge was Agnes Arber, the first woman botanist elected a Fellow of the Royal Society.⁶⁵ Bowler describes Raven's volume on Ray as 'a classic' in the field.⁶⁶ Raven followed it by a study of *English Naturalists from Neckham to Ray* (1947).⁶⁷ In *The British Journal for the History of Science* Raven's books were described as 'outstanding contributions to our subject'.⁶⁸

Pursuing some of these interests further, Raven took up the theme of 'Natural Religion and Christian Theology' when he delivered the prestigious Gifford lectures in Edinburgh (1951-52). In a remarkably ambitious

⁵⁹ Charles Raven, *Teilhard de Chardin: Scientist and Seer* (London: Collins, 1962), p. 29.

⁶⁰ Bryan Green to C.E. Raven, 28 July 1949; C.E. Raven to Bryan Green, 6 August 1949. Letters in the possession of Faith Raven.

⁶¹ C.E. Raven, *Synthetic Philosophy in the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1945). This was the Herbert Spencer Lecture for 1945.

⁶² C.E. Raven, *John Ray, Naturalist: His Life and Works* (Cambridge: University Press, 1942), p. 452.

⁶³ Ramsey, 'Charles Earle Raven', p. 475.

⁶⁴ Raven, *John Ray*, p. 452.

⁶⁵ C.E. Raven to Agnes Arber, 3 October 1940, in Box 131, 'Miscellaneous material belonging to Dr Charles Earle Raven', Christ's College.

⁶⁶ Bowler, *Reconciling Science and Religion*, p. 84.

⁶⁷ C.E. Raven, *English Naturalists from Neckham to Ray* (Cambridge: University Press, 1947).

⁶⁸ Butler, 'Charles Earle Raven', p. 254.

undertaking, he analysed the vision of nature in the Bible, in the early church period, in the Middle Ages and then from the Reformation to the twentieth century. A work like this had never been undertaken before and again Raven showed his ability to grasp and present historical details in a vivid way. He had an eye for the unusual. The sixteenth-century Reformation figure to whom he devoted attention was Conrad Gesner, who studied theology in Strasbourg and medicine in Basel. Gesner became a medical doctor in Zürich and a member of the Reformed Church. Raven outlined his significant contribution in the fields of medicine, zoology and biology. He was able, Raven argued, to 'do what most scholars did not venture upon until a century after his time', that is to study nature for himself.⁶⁹ Ten historical lectures by Raven were followed by ten theological lectures on themes with which Raven had wrestled: religious experience; the significance of Jesus; nature and God; the world and the Spirit; the Spirit and community; and eternal life. Raven's concern for 'natural religion' drew from the way Jesus spent so much time talking about 'flowers and birds and little children, the sowing of a field, the growth of a tree, the leavening of bread and the daily work of men and women'.⁷⁰ Raven wanted preachers to follow the example of Jesus.

The Gifford lectures represented substantial scholarship delivered in an academic setting, but Raven was also delighted when he could address other audiences. In 1930 he was a speaker at the annual Baptist Assembly, held that year in Liverpool. Addressing the Assembly on the 'Changed Intellectual Outlook' he stated: 'The scientific method has not only given us a new point of approach to every subject of intellectual enquiry, but has radically altered our whole outlook upon the universe and its development.' His view was that the Christian Church had the challenge of 'reinterpreting its whole presentation of the faith'.⁷¹ Writing to Glover, Raven reported: 'We had a good meeting of the Baptist Union here. I'm afraid I shocked a good many of your friends, but they were very kind to me... I took it for granted that in asking me they wanted an outspoken presentation of the modern standpoint, and felt that a member of another church could do this with less risk of a row than one of their own.' Raven said he had tried to be constructive and was happy to hear from Glover that he 'did not wholly miss the mark'.⁷² Raven pressed fellow-theologians to engage more deeply with science. In his inaugural lecture as Regius Professor in 1932, he noted the lack of theologians who had 'first-hand knowledge of modern science' and urged greater theological-scientific collaboration.⁷³ In 1943 Raven delivered

⁶⁹ C.E. Raven, *Natural Religion and Christian Theology: The Gifford Lectures 1951, First Series* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1953), p. 89.

⁷⁰ Raven, *Natural Religion*, p. 152.

⁷¹ *Baptist Times*, 8 May 1930, pp. 323-4.

⁷² C.E. Raven to T.R. Glover, 16 May 1930, St John's College, Cambridge. Glover/9/1/35.

⁷³ C.E. Raven, *Signs of the Times: Some Reflections upon the Scope and Opportunity of Theology* (Cambridge: University Press, 1932), pp. 29-30.

eight lectures in Cambridge on ‘Science, Religion and the Future’ - lectures that were highly acclaimed - in which he pressed home his vision of God at work in the creative process, in the ‘age-long agony of trial and error, defeat and endurance’.⁷⁴ Here was a theology congruent with evolution and one that in Raven’s view could powerfully assist contemporary mission.

Missional church: ‘community, the *koinonia* of the Holy Spirit’

Raven had no doubt that the church of his time had a crucial task: to change in order to connect with society. In *The Gospel and the Church*, Raven talked about the difficulty of the church being a bearer of the gospel because ‘ever since the fourth century the Church has been constituted after the fashion of an imperial and totalitarian state’.⁷⁵ Raven spoke of groups that had rebelled against ‘the Church’s denial of liberty and equality, its acquiescence in social injustice, its scramble for power, its perversion of the gospel’, instancing the Hussites, Lollards, Anabaptists, Moravians and Quakers. He argued for a rediscovery of the Holy Spirit and commitment to ‘community, the *koinonia* of the Holy Spirit’.⁷⁶ He also wanted to see ecclesiastical barriers broken down. In Cambridge Raven preached at the Congregational Church and Presbyterian churches. Glover was a member of St Andrew’s Street Baptist Church, Cambridge. Another Cambridge friend of Raven’s was Alex Wood, a Presbyterian elder and a Tutor in Science. Wood was an advocate for better housing in Cambridge. Raven quoted from John Oman, a Presbyterian, who said Wood was one of only three people he had known who applied their faith consistently.⁷⁷ Raven stressed personal rather than formal ecumenical dialogue. He described one ecumenical conference in Finland as characterised by ‘enthusiasm for unrealities’. Raven’s enjoyment began after the conference, when he explored Finland’s lakes, hills and forests.⁷⁸ In *Creator Spirit*, Raven opposed approaches which saw any ‘essential difference between the bread and wine consecrated by a Catholic priest and the bread and wine partaken of by a company of Plymouth Brethren’.⁷⁹ In 1928, writing to the Baptist minister Hugh Martin, Raven characterised their

⁷⁴ C.E. Raven, *Science, Religion and the Future* (Cambridge: University Press, 1943), p. 111; Butler, ‘Charles Earle Raven’, p. 255.

⁷⁵ Raven, *Gospel and Church*, p. 229.

⁷⁶ Raven, *Gospel and Church*, pp. 232, 249.

⁷⁷ C.E. Raven, *Alex Wood – the Man and his Message* (London: The Fellowship of Reconciliation, 1952), p. 9.

⁷⁸ Raven and Raven, *Wild Flowers*, p. 143.

⁷⁹ Raven, *Creator Spirit*, p. 270.

differences of view as 'relatively so trivial'.⁸⁰ When Raven spoke to the Baptist Assembly, he was appreciated as 'a real brother of Baptists'.⁸¹

A further cause Raven advocated was the ordination of women. Writing in 1929 about the ministry of women, Raven explained how his conviction had grown 'that the admission of women to Holy Orders on an equality with men is inherent in the teaching of Jesus and necessitated by a true understanding of the nature of the Church'.⁸² Raven wrote about Beatrice Hankey, whose mission work among the poor he came to respect deeply in the 1920s and who he saw as 'far more a bishop' than any clergyman. He paid tribute in 1932 to the 'gift of the Spirit' which enabled the ministry of Hankey and her associates.⁸³ Raven also spoke of his 'deep and long-standing' debt to the mystical writer Evelyn Underhill, who died in 1941.⁸⁴ Raven knew 'literally dozens of women far more fit for ordination than the majority of the men now being accepted; and this not because the men are of poor quality, but because the women are better'.⁸⁵ Raven, looking to Jesus as 'our prime authority', noted how Jesus broke entirely with religious convention in the place he gave to women. Raven cited examples from the gospels, concluding that in the ministry of Jesus 'there is neither male nor female'.⁸⁶ In 1942 Raven became President of the (interdenominational) Society for the Equal Ministry of Men and Women in the Church, a body supported by Congregational and Baptist leaders (whose denominations had women ministers) and by significant Anglicans.⁸⁷

Although Raven pressed for structural changes in church life, his deeper concern was for renewal through the Holy Spirit. Raven wrote on 'The Holy Spirit' in 1918, expressing his disappointment at the lack of any serious attention to the Spirit in training for ministry. Raven argued that 'we are not yet full of the Holy Ghost and of power' and that a new outpouring of the Spirit was needed for mission. He believed that 'somewhere even now fresh wine-skins are being made ready'.⁸⁸ A decade later, the theme of a Church Congress in 1927 was 'The Eternal Spirit'. Raven was a moving force in this week-long Congress, which attracted 2,000 participants, and it was Raven who drafted the Congress report.⁸⁹ Raven's most extended

⁸⁰ C.E. Raven, *The Quest of Religion* (London: SCM, 1928), p. 9.

⁸¹ *Baptist Times*, 15 May 1930, p. 353.

⁸² C.E. Raven, *Women and the Ministry* (New York: Doubleday, Doran and Co., 1929), preface; cf. C.E. Raven, *Women and Holy Orders* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1928).

⁸³ C.E. Raven, *One called Help* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1937); cf. Dillistone, *Raven*, pp. 265-71.

⁸⁴ C.E. Raven, *Natural Religion and Christian Theology*, Vol. II (Cambridge: University Press, 1953), p. 206.

⁸⁵ Raven, *Women and the Ministry*, p. 69.

⁸⁶ Raven, *Women and Ministry*, pp. 99-100.

⁸⁷ Leaflet about the Society in the possession of Faith Raven. Paul Gibson, in 'Women and the Priesthood' (1933), quotes Raven. Manuscript held at Ridley Hall, Cambridge.

⁸⁸ Raven, 'The Holy Spirit', pp. 219, 256-7.

⁸⁹ C.E. Raven, *The Eternal Spirit* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1926).

treatment of the Spirit was in *Creator Spirit*. He spoke of how the church's Apostolic age 'throbs with spiritual power', witnessing to 'the source of that power in the living Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of holiness'.⁹⁰ For Raven, historic creeds failed to do justice to this dimension. Scripture, he argued in 1936, 'insists upon the perpetual presence and energy of the Spirit and this supplies us with a theology of divine immanence', and creedal failure to formulate this was serious. Raven associated it with the loss of 'the charismatic concept of the ministry' as set out in Paul's letters.⁹¹ In 1943 Raven returned to this theme, stating that in the creeds 'full justice was done to God's work in the past.... But of His present indwelling life... there was not a word.' This theme, he added, was present in Clement and Origen. For Raven, a major task was to 'discover or recover the secret of Pentecost'. He recalled that it was when he went to Liverpool Cathedral that he made his first attempt at such discovery.⁹² The work of the Spirit, for Raven, was a doctrine, but more importantly it was an experience that equipped people for mission.

Spiritual experience, in Raven's thinking, should always be related to Christ, and especially to God incarnate in Jesus. Michael Ramsey argued that Raven had a special place in the development of incarnational thinking.⁹³ In the local church setting, preaching in Holy Trinity Church, Cambridge, in 1925, Raven pointed to the necessity of facing sin and discovering 'the secret of salvation in Jesus Christ. He is Saviour'.⁹⁴ This emphasis might have afforded Raven common ground with Karl Barth, and Raven was thankful for Barth's condemnation of '(t)he sort of liberalism, too prevalent a generation ago, which ignored the gravity of moral issues, deprecated the sense of personal guilt, felt no need for conversion'. Raven spoke of Barth's 'greatness, his passion, his courage', and went so far as to say that 'as a Christian I am not fit to be compared with him at any point', but Raven added that in the War he had been 'down to hell' and 'found God there', and he believed that God was 'involved in the struggle' with evil and had taken humanity into partnership through the incarnation.⁹⁵ Raven rejected pantheism, but advocated an 'incarnational and sacramental view of the Universe'.⁹⁶ He believed that when the church reached out to others, God was already there.

⁹⁰ Raven, *Creator Spirit*, p. 2.

⁹¹ Raven, *Evolution and the Christian Concept*, pp. 41-3.

⁹² Raven, *Good News of God*, pp. 100-1, 103.

⁹³ A.M. Ramsay, *Gore to Temple* (London: Longmans, 1960), pp. 25-6.

⁹⁴ Raven, *Our Salvation*, pp. 201.

⁹⁵ Raven, *Gospel and Church*, pp. 219-221. 1939

⁹⁶ Raven, *Gospel and Church*, p. 89; Raven, *Evolution and the Christian Concept*, pp. 30, 31.

The Task of Mission: 'a generation of disciples'

When Raven became Dean of Emmanuel College, Cambridge, in 1910, he joined a university Religious Discussion Society. He recalled that he was the only professing Christian in the group and described how he came away from the meetings 'literally worn out with the strain of my puny efforts to make a case for the faith that was in me'. It was this which stimulated him to a fuller articulation of faith, which he presented in talks given in Tonbridge, and this led to the production of *What think ye of Christ?*⁹⁷ Referring in his talks to recent portrayals of Jesus, Raven argued that the 'critical method which has found favour in Germany and too often among ourselves' had produced a picture of Christ 'scarcely more true to the Gospels than the Christ of the stained glass window' and was 'totally inadequate'.⁹⁸ Following his return to Cambridge after the war, Raven was deeply involved in an ecumenical Mission to the University in 1920. Overall he estimated half the university attended mission meetings.⁹⁹ Over the next four decades Raven led a number of missions. Leading a mission in Holy Trinity Church in 1925, Raven spoke of the 'renewed interest in evangelism' as 'perhaps the most hopeful sign of the times'.¹⁰⁰ Talks he gave at a university mission he led in Montreal in 1956 were published as *Christ and the Modern Opportunity*.¹⁰¹

Raven always believed that the verbal presentation of the Christian message in a coherent way needed to be accompanied by actions. One picture he retained from his experiences in the deprived areas of Liverpool was of fish and chips being distributed to a group of women and how he felt 'the glory' of how God gives daily bread.¹⁰² The war brought Raven into new experiences of human need. In his letters from the Front he spoke of God 'with me when I was blown up by a shell, and gassed, and sniped at, with me in bombardment and the daily walk of death', and described being alongside others as shells were landing, as someone died.¹⁰³ Raven began to think about effective mission in these circumstances. He referred to having had a 'good service' one Sunday, with a young soldier from a Nonconformist chapel writing a 'very flattering account' of the service for his pastor. Raven did not want such an enthusiastic report circulated.¹⁰⁴ In July 1917 Raven was discovering that 'wandering round in the trenches... does a certain amount of indirect good: it makes the men feel that the clergy do care for

⁹⁷ Raven, *What think ye of Christ?*, pp. xix-xxi.

⁹⁸ Raven, *What think ye of Christ?*, pp. 104-5.

⁹⁹ C.E. Raven, ed., *The Mission to Cambridge University, 1919-20: A Report* (London: SCM, 1920), pp. 44-5, 64.

¹⁰⁰ Raven, *Our Salvation*, p. 3.

¹⁰¹ C.E. Raven, *Christ and the Modern Opportunity* (London: SCM, 1956).

¹⁰² Raven, *Wanderer's Way*, p. 85.

¹⁰³ Raven, *Wanderer's Way*, pp. 156-7.

¹⁰⁴ Charles Raven to S.W. Burgess, 15 May 1917; 21 May 1917. Letters held in Christ's College, Cambridge.

them, and aren't afraid.'¹⁰⁵ The soldiers enjoyed talking about religion, Raven said, 'provided one is human and not clerical'. Raven's experience of mission during the war led him to affirm that 'friendliness leads very easily to religion'. He also found those to whom he spoke 'less critical' than some in Tonbridge.¹⁰⁶ Raven was eager to communicate with those outside the formal structures of the church.

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s Raven continued to look closely at the challenge of mission in contemporary society. By the 1930s Raven had concluded that part of the calling of the church in society was to renounce militarism, and he delivered an apologia in 1934, published as *Is War Obsolete?* (1935), which he followed up by becoming associated with the pacifist cause during the Second World War. Raven became chairman of the interdenominational Fellowship of Reconciliation, and urged Christians to seek to convince others 'that the power of the Spirit is stronger than the arms of the flesh and that in these days warfare is as obsolete and as intolerable as slavery'.¹⁰⁷ It was typical of Raven to re-constitute the common expression 'arm of the flesh' to 'arms', in the context of military arms. Raven's pacifism led him into difficulties with the BBC. His ability as a broadcaster was increasingly being recognised, but in 1940 James Welch, the BBC's Director of Religious Broadcasting, wrote to Raven to say: 'There does remain the implicit injunction that our religious broadcasting should be in accordance with the national effort.'¹⁰⁸ Despite Welch's efforts to defend him, Raven was banned as a war-time broadcaster. By the 1950s, however, Raven's stance was no longer contentious and he worked closely with Edwin Robertson, a Baptist minister in religious broadcasting at the BBC, contributing important series such as 'The Making of Modern Science'. Raven also took similar talks into schools in this period.¹⁰⁹ He had a remarkable range of abilities as a Christian communicator.

Finally, Raven's sense of the missional task was international as well as national. In 1928 Raven delivered a crucial address to the International Missionary Council in Jerusalem on the teaching method of Jesus. He also took part in an inter-denominational service of Holy Communion in Jerusalem, something that was radical for Anglicans at that time but which the ecumenical statesman, John Mott, said had been a hope over the previous forty years.¹¹⁰ In his address, Raven spoke of the challenge for all churches to work together 'to train up in all lands a generation of disciples'. He also highlighted the global character of mission, suggesting that 'to fail in

¹⁰⁵ Charles Raven to S.W. Burgess, 18 July 1917.

¹⁰⁶ Charles Raven to S.W. Burgess, 7 February 1918; 19 February 1918.

¹⁰⁷ C.E. Raven, *Is War Obsolete?* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1935), p. 183

¹⁰⁸ J.W. Welch to C.E. Raven, 11 September 1940. Letter in the possession of Faith Raven.

¹⁰⁹ Dillistone, *Raven*, pp. 335-41.

¹¹⁰ Dillistone, *Raven*, p. 156.

Birmingham was as much a failure in missionary work as to fail in Bombay'.¹¹¹ In 1930, on 'The Church of Today', he argued that the distinction between 'the Christian countries and the mission abroad, must be abandoned'. Britain was just as much a place for missionary effort as Asia or Africa.¹¹² Raven was also aware of the multi-faith context. He mused in 1936 that his own experience of Christ had over time grown 'stronger, deeper, and more real' because he had seen God in nature, in humanity and in other religions.¹¹³ At the same time, he found hope in 'the enormous expansion of the Church in Asia and Africa'.¹¹⁴ In a lecture in 1958, published by the Council of Christians and Jews, Raven urged an understanding of the potential of human community in the context of a multi-religious world.¹¹⁵ For Raven, the task of church was always to be a witnessing community.

Conclusion

Charles Raven's life was multi-faceted. His experience of faith was profound and his language in describing his experiences resonated with evangelical spirituality. During the First World War, for example, he found that despite all the horrors, 'God was there', as a 'companion to lean upon'.¹¹⁶ From his early years Raven had a fascination with and a deep appreciation of nature. He consistently advocated the importance of the natural world as a crucial aspect of the spiritual life and as an aspect of mission. In relation to questions of evolution and theology, Mark Richardson explores how Raven pictured 'the jagged lines of ascent' as God worked in the evolutionary story. Richardson notes that Raven anticipated work by Holmes Rolston.¹¹⁷ Raven also considered that the work of the Holy Spirit was of enormous importance in theology and in living a full-orbed life. He was dissatisfied with Barthian theology which he believed had neglected the Spirit and had failed to 'discover value in the agonisings and aspirations of the creation'.¹¹⁸ There was much that Raven believed needed to be renewed in the church of his time if it was to be effective in its role in serving God's mission in the world.

¹¹¹ C.E. Raven, *Christ and Modern Education* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1928), p. 33.

¹¹² C.E. Raven, 'The Church's Task in the World', in J.F. Bethune-Baker, ed., *The Christian Religion: Its Origin and Progress*, Vol. 3, P. Gardner-Smith, F.C. Burkitt and C.E. Raven, *The Church of Today* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1930), p. 358.

¹¹³ Raven, *Evolution and the Christian Concept*, p. 37.

¹¹⁴ C.E. Raven, *Lessons of the Prince of Peace* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1942), p. 91.

¹¹⁵ C.E. Raven, *Tolerance and Religion* (London: Council of Christians and Jews, 1958).

¹¹⁶ Charles Raven to S.W. Burgess, 3 June 1917.

¹¹⁷ Mark W. Richardson, 'Evolutionary-Emergent Worldview and Anglican Theological Revision: Case Studies from the 1920s', *Anglican Theological Review*, Vol. 92, No. 2 (2010), p. 331. See also Christopher Southgate, *The Groaning of Creation: God, Evolution and the Problem of Evil* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008). I am grateful to Dr John Polkinghorne for drawing my attention to this work.

¹¹⁸ Raven, 'Questions about the Reformed Faith', p. 9.

Throughout his life as a Christian, Raven was concerned that the Christian message should be communicated in an authentic way and he is an example of how this could be done effectively. Adrian Hastings, in his history of English Christianity in the twentieth century, suggests that in the late 1930s Raven, ‘for all his brilliance and pursuit of relevance, found himself regarded as irrelevant’.¹¹⁹ This study suggests a different perspective: that Charles Raven, as a missional theologian, was in significant respects ahead of his time.

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¹¹⁹ Adrian Hastings, *A History of English Christianity, 1920-2000* (London: SCM, 2001), p. 294.

The Moment of Grace and Opportunity: The Global Kairos Movement for Justice in the Holy Land¹

Mark Braverman

A Moment of Truth for South Africa

This is the KAIROS, the moment of grace and opportunity, the favorable time in which God issues a challenge to decisive action. (*The Kairos Document: Challenge to the Church*, South Africa, 1985)

By the mid-1980s the government of South Africa was contemplating its own fall. The outlawed and exiled African National Congress was escalating the armed struggle. The townships seethed in the face of brutal military repression. World governments were joining the global movement to sanction the country economically and isolate it politically and culturally. Still, the Pretoria government clung to power. And then the church acted. In 1985 a group of South African pastors and theologians brought out a prophetic document that took an unequivocal stand against the apartheid regime, speaking out directly against the complicity of the churches. Entitled *Challenge to the Church, A Theological Comment on the Political Crisis in South Africa*, this prophetic statement is commonly known as the *South Africa Kairos* document. Whereas previous theological documents critical of apartheid had already condemned it as a ‘false gospel’ and ‘sinful’ (*The Message to the People of South Africa*, issued by the South African Council of Churches in 1968²) and as a ‘heresy’ (*The Belhar Confession of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church*, 1982³), the Kairos document went further, declaring the apartheid regime illegitimate and calling for its fall. The authors declared it to be their duty as Christians ‘to refuse to cooperate with tyranny and to do whatever we can to remove it’.⁴

¹ An earlier version of this essay was presented at the “Where We Dwell in Common” Ecumenical Conference, Assisi, Italy, 1-20 April, 2012 and was published as “A moment of truth: A word of faith, hope and love from the heart of Palestinian suffering” in *Theologies and Cultures*, Vol. XI, No. 1, June 2014, pp. 138-154.

² South Africa Council of Churches: ‘A Message to the People of South Africa’ in Charles Villa-Vicencio, *Between Christ and Caesar: Classic and Contemporary Texts on Church and State* (William B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI), pp. 214-216.

³ Dutch Reformed Mission Church: ‘Confession of Faith’ in Charles Villa-Vicencio, *Between Christ and Caesar: Classic and Contemporary Texts on Church and State* (William B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI), pp. 241-244.

⁴ Kairos South Africa: ‘Challenge to the Church: A Theological Comment on the Political Crisis in South Africa’ in *Kairos: Three Prophetic Challenges to the Church* (ed.) Robert McAfee Brown (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), pp. 17-69.

The *South Africa Kairos* document articulated a *moral* imperative to recognize the evil of apartheid and to take direct action to address it. But, true to its title, the main thrust of this historic document was to present a *theological* imperative - challenging the faithful, in the words of one of its authors, theologian Charles Villa-Vicencio, to 'wrench the church from its slumbers'. 'A church', wrote Villa-Vicencio several years after the publication of the Kairos document, 'trapped in the dominant structures of oppression, controlled by entrenched bureaucracy, [and] conditioned by a history of compromise' at its peril ignores the voices of the oppressed.⁵ The document addressed itself directly to the South African church's history of complicity with apartheid, describing the 'church theology' that had rendered the church ineffective against the racist policies of the government. It announced that a profound crisis for the church had arrived - a 'moment of truth', in the words of the document, 'that shows us up for what we really are'. The authors announced their goal clearly: 'critique of the current theological models that determine the type of activities the Church engages in to try to resolve the problems of the country...to develop, out of this perplexing situation, an alternative biblical and theological model that will in turn lead to forms of activity that will make a real difference to the future of our country'.⁶

This willingness of church leaders to take a bold stance on this urgent issue of social justice was presaged in 1982 when the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) meeting in Ottawa, Canada declared the world body in *status confessionis* because of its failure to directly confront the apartheid practices of its South African member churches. At that time, the WARC suspended the South African member churches and was soon joined by churches on a global level in support of those South Africans, in the churches as well as members of student, labour and political movements, committed to fundamental political change. The overwhelming support of the global church for civil society resistance to apartheid accelerated the political and economic sanctions against the state that brought about the change in government in 1994.

Public theology and church renewal

The most striking feature of the *South Africa Kairos* document is its uncompromising analysis of how the South African church had supported apartheid. The authors took aim at the church's appropriation of words and concepts such as *reconciliation*, *justice*, and *nonviolence* that amounted to a betrayal of core Christian theological precepts. 'In our situation in South

⁵ Charles Villa-Vicencio, *Trapped in Apartheid* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988), pp. 200, 201.

⁶ Kairos South Africa, 'Challenge to the Church'.

Africa today,' they wrote, 'it would be totally un-Christian to plead for reconciliation and peace before the present injustices have been removed. Any such plea plays into the hands of the oppressor by trying to persuade those of us who are oppressed to accept our oppression and to become reconciled to the intolerable crimes that are committed against us. That is not Christian reconciliation, it is sin. No reconciliation is possible in South Africa *without justice*.' (emphasis in original)⁷ The document demonstrated how *justice* had come to mean 'the justice of reform' - concessions offered by the ruling power to the oppressed that rather than remove actually served to strengthen the system of inequality, and how the use of the concept of *nonviolence* legitimated the violence of the oppressor while criminalising the protest of the oppressed.

In taking this stance against the complicity of the church, these South African church leaders – through all the years of struggle a minority among their peers – stood in opposition to the very institutions of which they were a part. Not only did these clergy, academics and heads of church organisations position themselves against the evil of apartheid - they often had to stand up to those members of the faith community who insisted that 'the church and politics do not mix'. A key point, therefore, in understanding kairos theology and kairos movements in every historical era is that they represent a *church struggle*. In their aptly named *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, South African theologians John and Steve De Gruchy write:

The church is called to bear witness to the Kingdom of God in the world... This being so, a faithful church will always find itself in tension with society. For this reason, the church desperately needs the presence of prophetic movements... for these movements provide the critique that forces the church to a new assessment of itself. Such movements are part of God's way of renewing the church in every generation and situation.⁸

The unwillingness to compromise on core issues, coupled with the willingness to step outside the strictures of the institutional church, characterises the kairos documents that followed the South African document of 1985. Kairos is a public theology – a theology whose function, in the words of theologian Duncan Forrester, is to 'contribute to a public discussion by witnessing to a truth which is relevant to what is going on in the world and to the pressing issues facing people and society today'.⁹ In this, it hearkens back to the original *kairos*, the confrontation of a visionary, prophetic figure with the evil of empire – the man from Galilee standing up to the greatest power in the world. As distinct from the Greek *kronos*,

⁷ Kairos South Africa, 'Challenge to the Church'.

⁸ John W. de Gruchy and Steve de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2005), p. 111.

⁹ Duncan B. Forrester., *Truthful Action: Explorations in Practical Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), p. 127.

meaning chronological time, *kairos* exists outside of our linear counting of days weeks and years. It is the right or favourable moment, when history opens up to the possibility for fundamental change, when, to quote Robert McAfee Brown, ‘God offers a new set of possibilities and we have to accept or decline.’¹⁰ The first *kairos* embodied three key elements: (1) an urgent socio-political situation – the tyranny of Rome - that threatened the economic and social fabric of a village-based agrarian society based on social justice and compassion for the most vulnerable; (2) a God-given ethical and spiritual tradition, rooted in a civilisation under mortal threat by a tyrannical system; and (3) the appearance of a prophetic witness, teacher and leader who called his people and their leadership to non-violent resistance to that tyranny, a resistance based on faithfulness to the essence of their tradition. Jesus knew that the challenge of the historical circumstances required a return to the essential truths of the Jewish tradition, truths that had been betrayed by the monarchical/priestly system installed in Jerusalem in open and active collaboration with the Roman occupier.

The South African document was followed by a series of *kairos* statements originating from other national, regional and international contexts. *Kairós Centroamericano: A Challenge to the Churches of the World* emerged in 1988, followed by *The Road to Damascus: Kairos and Conversion* from Africa, Central America and Asia in 1989, *A Kairos for Kenya* in 1991, the *European Kairos* document in 1998, and documents from the United States, Zimbabwe, and India in 1994, 1998, and 1999. Authored by theologians, clergy and laypersons, these documents rejected the reforms that had been proposed or undertaken by governments and non-governmental groups, moves intended to preserve rather than remove the structural injustice embedded in the political systems. Invoking the fundamental Christian principles of equality and compassion, the authors of these document declared that in the face of forces arrayed to maintain unjust systems, the church faces a fundamental crisis - in the words of *Road to Damascus* ‘the time for a decisive turnabout on the part of those groups and individuals who have consciously or unconsciously compromised their Christian faith for political, economic and selfish reasons.’¹¹ Echoing Jesus’ admonition in Luke 12:56, each document called on the church and on global society as a whole to ‘read the signs of the times’, conditions as inescapably compelling as those that engendered the life-changing experience after which the 1990 *Road to Damascus* was named. *Kairos* was the fortunate time, it was God’s time.

¹⁰ Robert McAfee Brown (ed.), *Kairos: Three Prophetic Challenges to the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), p. 3.

¹¹ ‘The Road to Damascus: Kairos and Conversion’ in Brown, p. 114.

A Moment of Truth

Following the end of Apartheid in 1994, except for the emergence of Archbishop Desmond Tutu as a world-renowned religious leader and proponent of non-violent resistance, the role of the church in that struggle was largely forgotten, as was the role of the World Alliance of Reform Churches in the global movement that brought an end to legalized racism in South Africa. In recent years, however, the concept of *kairos* and the church activism it represents has revived with the steady growth in awareness of the historic and ongoing oppression of the Palestinians. Indeed, the South African document set the standard for the Palestine Kairos document of 2009, entitled *A Moment of Truth: A Word of Faith, Hope and Love from the Heart of Palestinian Suffering*. Also known as *Kairos Palestine*, the document, written by Palestinian clergy, theologians and civil society leaders from across the ecumenical spectrum, clearly and boldly presented the ‘signs of the times’: a brutal and worsening occupation that was the continuation of a programme of ethnic cleansing that had begun with the declaration of the State of Israel in 1948. It articulated a theology that required non-violent resistance to the evil of occupation: ‘resistance with love as its logic’. Naming the Israeli occupation a sin, it called out to the international community, reserving its final appeal for the church itself: ‘What is the international community doing? What are the political leaders in Palestine, in Israel and in the Arab world doing? What is the Church doing?’¹²

It is this last question that most urgently occupied the authors and is the key message of *Kairos Palestine*. The document calls the church to its core mission:

The mission of the church is prophetic; to speak the Word of God courageously, honestly and lovingly in the local context and in the midst of daily events. If she does take sides, it is with the oppressed, to stand alongside them, just as Christ our Lord stood by the side of each poor person and each sinner, calling them to repentance, life, and the restoration of the dignity bestowed on them by God and that no one has the right to strip away.¹³

The theology is straightforward and contextually grounded:

We declare that the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land is a sin against God and humanity because it deprives the Palestinians of their basic human rights, bestowed by God. It distorts the image of God in the Israeli who has become an occupier just as it distorts this image in the Palestinian living under occupation. We declare that any theology, seemingly based on the Bible or on faith or on history, that legitimizes the occupation, is far from Christian teachings, because it calls for violence and holy war in the name of God

¹² Kairos Palestine: ‘A Moment of Truth: A Word of Faith, Hope and Love from the Heart of Palestinian Suffering’. <http://www.kairospalestine.ps/sites/default/Documents/English.pdf>, accessed 15 January, 2014.

¹³ Kairos Palestine, ‘A Moment of Truth’.

Almighty, subordinating God to temporary human interests, and distorting the divine image in the human beings living under both political and theological injustice.¹⁴

Key to its opposition to the misuse of theology to justify dispossession and conquest is the document's concise articulation of a theology of land:

Our land is God's land, as is the case with all countries in the world. It is holy in as much as God is present in it, for God alone is holy and sanctifier. It is the duty of those of us who live here, to respect the will of God for this land. It is our duty to liberate it from the evil of injustice and war. It is God's land and therefore it must be a land of reconciliation, peace and love. This is indeed possible. God has put us here as two peoples, and God gives us the capacity if we have the will, to live together and establish in it justice and peace, making it in reality God's land: 'The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it'.¹⁵

Like its South African predecessor, the Palestinian call created a moment of truth for the church on a global level. The concept of *status confessionis* speaks to this: in Robert McAfee Brown's phrasing, 'when the issues become so clear, and the stakes so high, that the privilege of amiable disagreement must be superseded by clear cut decisions, and the choice must move from both/and to either/or.'¹⁶ *Kairos Palestine* has been commended for study by congregations and denominations worldwide and has spawned kairos movements and documents in Asia, Europe, and the Americas. *Call to Action: US Response to the Kairos Palestine document*, was published in June 2012.¹⁷ *Call to Action* acknowledges the central role played the US government in its unqualified and massive support for Israel. Like the South African document that challenged the 'church theology' that had supported the unjust system, *Call to Action* directly addresses key theological and ecclesial issues that bear on a US Christian response to the Palestinian call. These include the effects of Christian Zionism in its various forms on US government and institutional church policies, the influence of the post-World War II Christian renunciation of displacement theology on church teachings in pastoral training and in Christian-Jewish relations, and the impact of Jewish institutional opposition to any perceived threat to US government support of Israel. The US document was followed in 2013 by *Time for Action: A British Christian Response to 'Moment of Truth', the Palestine Kairos Document* which coupled a critique of Christian Zionism with a

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Kairos Palestine. 'A Moment of Truth'.

¹⁶ Brown, p. 7.

¹⁷ Kairos USA. 'Call to Action: A US Christian Response to the Kairos Palestine Document', 2012, http://kairosusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Kairos-USA-Call-to-Action_.pdf, accessed 14 April, 2014.

powerful confession of the destructive role of Great Britain in the twentieth century history of settlement in historic Palestine.¹⁸

Confession of the complicit

The Kairos documents that have emerged from kairos organisations throughout Europe, Asia and the America are responses to the Palestinian call, but they bear the greatest resemblance to their South African predecessor. Whereas the Palestinian document is the cry of the oppressed, the statements originating from the global church are the confessions of the complicit: powerful expressions about how their churches - sometimes in open collusion with their governments - have supported tyranny and oppression.¹⁹ *A Philippine Response to Kairos Palestine*, published in 2011, issues a bold declaration:

Not unlike the ancient Israelites who were too often rebuked by the prophets for failing to write the law in their hearts, most of contemporary Christianity have failed to grasp what is at the heart of Judaeo-Christianity, and of the 'Abrahamic' faith. We have walked unashamedly with an oppressive empire, unkindly and heartlessly walked past the victims of the violent politics of occupation, and consented to injustice with our silence. We have failed to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God.²⁰

The confession contained in *Kairos USA* is equally direct and free of qualification:

As individuals and as church institutions, we have supported a system of control, inequality and oppression through misreading of our Holy Scriptures, flawed theology and distortions of history. We have allowed to go unchallenged theological and political ideas that have made us complicit in the oppression of the Palestinian people.²¹

Across the world, Christians – clergy, theologians and laypersons, awakened to the plight of the Palestinians, echo the confession as expressed here by the authors of *Kairos Philippines*: 'We repent from leaving them isolated for so long and for the absence of our commitment and unceasing prayers. We will not accept that all Palestinian people continue to be debased, robbed of their

¹⁸ Kairos UK. 'Time for Action: A British Christian Response to 'Moment of Truth', the Palestine Kairos Document', 2013.

¹⁹ As such they stand in the tradition of the community-based theology that originated in Latin America in the second half of the twentieth century. Catholic priest and historian of liberation theology Phillip Berryman outlines the three tasks of liberation theology: 'to reinterpret Christian faith in terms of the bleak lot of the poor; to criticize society and its ideologies through theology; and to observe and comment on the practices of the church itself, and of Christians.' (Phillip Berryman, *Liberation Theology: The Essential Facts about the Revolutionary Movement in Latin America and Beyond* (New York: Pantheon, 1987), p. 87.

²⁰ Kairos Philippines. 'Reclaiming the good news of the holy land and the imperative of Interfaith solidarity to resist empire: a Philippine theological Response to Kairos Palestine.'

²¹ Kairos USA. 'Call to Action'.

honor and their divine image.’²² *Kairos Palestina Brasil* in 2012 followed with equally powerful affirmations of faith, coupled with acknowledgments of the responsibility to respond to the call of the oppressed. All of these documents include pledges, in the words of the US document, to ‘[e]xamine flawed biblical interpretations and unexamined theology that have shaped attitudes and perceptions leading to and allowing the present injustice to continue unchallenged.’²³

These confessional statements and the commitment to the work of theology on the part of theologians and church leaders are powerfully grounded in the contextual realities of their authors. In the case of Brazil and the Philippines, the vivid memories of the colonial past and the even fresher experience of the subjugation of indigenous peoples are explicitly stated. ‘The Bible,’ asserts *Kairos Brazil*, ‘served as a guide for the colonial domination in Latina America and still today we feel the consequences of Christendom allied to imperial power.’ The document calls for a direct evaluation of how the Bible has been read and used: ‘We reject any pretension to the use of the Bible as a weapon of discrimination and justification for abuse, dispossession and subordination of the Palestinian people. We are committed with the critical reading and the overcoming of those readings and their cultural modes in our churches and communities.’²⁴ The authors of the Philippine document express themselves on this topic with unrestrained passion: ‘Imperial discourses masquerading as ‘theologies’ and ‘gospels’ need be exposed for what they are: theologies and gospels that feast on death.’ Relating the occupation of Palestine to the Philippine context as well as to the historical picture of Empire’s misuse of theology on a global scale, the document continues:

The use of the Bible to justify occupation and ethnic cleansing must be exposed for what it is, an anti-biblical, anti-Christian theology that does nothing but instigate and perpetuate a theo-praxis of unrestrained genocidal violence...a god-logic that easily on the crusader idea of a clash of civilizations – and the need for it to take place in ‘Megiddo’, including the latter’s spatial appropriations in places like Muslim Mindanao. It has not been unusual for Fundamentalist Christians in the Philippines to lump Palestinians with the Moros of Southern Philippines together.²⁵

Like the Philippine authors, the writers of the Brazilian document understand the Palestinian crisis in the light of past and present abuses of the Bible in the service of imperial strivings:

²² Kairos Palestine. ‘A Moment of Truth’.

²³ Kairos USA. ‘Call to Action.’

²⁴ Kairós Palestina Brasil, 2012, <http://kairosbrasil.com/img/KairosBrasilEN.pdf>, accessed 15 January, 2014.

²⁵ Kairos Philippines. ‘Reclaiming the good news of the holy land and the imperative of Interfaith solidarity to resist empire: a Philippine theological Response to Kairos Palestine.’

The prolonged Palestinian crisis demonstrates the sophistication with which the empire has been casting its deathly shadow on every nook and cranny of this planet. This included the empires' cooptation of religious language; its forming a theological language for conquest and occupation; its ability to build a religious consensus for silence if not support for crusader religious discourse. For many decades now, the occupation has thrived on the perverted militance and neo-crusader ethos of right wing Christianity, and on the macabre silence of much of the world's religions.²⁶

The US and UK documents similarly exhibit an acute awareness of the connection of church and theology with the historical and cultural legacy of their national contexts. The authors of the UK document call on British Christians to 'recognise the unique historical responsibility of our nation for the present injustice visited on the Palestinian people. This tragedy, which has led to 11 million Palestinians living in exile, in refugee camps, or under Israeli occupation, has its roots in Britain's colonial past, and Britain's self-interested pursuit of power and influence in the world. We call for repentance for Britain's historic, and current, complicity in the ongoing Palestinian suffering, and for those times when churches have promoted theological interpretations that support discrimination, dispossession, segregation and occupation.'²⁷ In contrast, the US confession is, appropriately, cast in the present tense: 'Rather than acting as an honest broker in negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians, our government has consistently supported, both financially and diplomatically, the actions of Israel that have brought suffering to Palestinians, continuing insecurity to Israelis and the receding prospect of a just peace.'²⁸

In the US and UK documents, the object of the call to action was not only the tyrannous system itself, but the 'moderating' forces that sought to preserve the unjust system through the appropriation of language and outright co-optation of religious and political leaders. This was certainly the case for South Africa in the 1980s, with the Pretoria government's attempted 'reforms' in the establishment of black vassal states (the 'Bantustans') governed by black political leaders selected by the apartheid regime. The official commitment of the Israeli government since the Oslo Accords of 1993 to a 'two-state solution' bears disturbing resemblance to the earlier example, with the resulting Palestinian 'state' consisting of enclaves located within the entire territory of historic Palestine controlled militarily and economically by Israel. Israel's stated commitment to the goal of a sovereign Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza, a goal also supported

²⁶ Kairos Palestina Brasil, 2012, <http://kairosbrasil.com/img/KairosBrasilEN.pdf>, accessed 15 January, 2014.

²⁷ Kairos UK. 'Time for Action' <http://www.kairosbritain.org.uk/resources/documents/Time-for-Action/Time-for-Action.pdf>, accessed 23 March, 2014.

²⁸ Kairos USA. 'Call to Action'.

vigorously by Western governments, particularly the US and its European allies, has masked its actual policy of actions designed to never allow such a state to come into being. The US government in particular has colluded with Israel in saying one thing while providing the means, both diplomatically and financially, for Israel to do another.²⁹

Freeing the theological discourse: unlocking the rules for Christian-Jewish dialogue

Like the South African churches (both white and black), throughout the apartheid years, the US church bears a burden of responsibility in its historic and current support, institutionally and theologically, for Israel's programmes of dispossession and ethnic cleansing. Similar to South African church statements that predated the 1985 Kairos document, statements from central US church bodies, while expressing support for Palestinian human rights, have supported a two-state formula without questioning what this represents in reality with respect to equality and sovereignty for Palestinians. In an effort to preserve relations with the institutional Jewish community, statements on the part of mainline Protestant denominations and the Roman Catholic Church in the US have promoted a 'balanced' approach to talking about Israel and the Palestinians. According to this approach, it is allowable to write or speak about the abrogation of Palestinian rights and about Palestinian suffering, but only if this is accompanied by an acknowledgment of historic Jewish suffering, acceptance of a superior Jewish claim to the land, and the primacy of security for the Jewish state – threatened, presumably, by eternal, implacable Arab hatred for Jews and the intention of annihilating the State of Israel.³⁰ This position, until recently adopted by even the most progressive elements of the US church, ignores the overwhelming power imbalance between the occupying power and the occupied population. It also violates the fundamental Christian principle of equality and the requirement to stand up to regimes and systems that abrogate the human rights of minorities, dispossessed indigenous populations and other vulnerable groups.

This status quo is now being challenged by the introduction of the *Kairos Palestine* document into church study groups, the appearance of the

²⁹ See Rashid Khalidi, *Brokers of Deceit: How the US Has Undermined Peace in the Middle East* (Beacon Press, 2013).

³⁰ The fact of Israelis' fear of annihilation is not in dispute. The question of the reality of the threat, however, is relevant. Israeli author Miko Peled addresses this issue in his memoir *The General's Son: Journey of an Israeli in Palestine* (Justworld Books, 2012), in which he chronicles how Israeli generals and politicians have traded on the powerful fiction of Israel's military vulnerability. Ira Chernus offers a compelling analysis of this issue in his 18 April, 2011, piece in *The Nation*, 'Three Myths of Israel's Insecurity', <http://www.thenation.com/article/159998/three-myths-israels-insecurity>, accessed 20 April, 2014.

Kairos USA document, and the acceleration of efforts within major Protestant denominations to divest church pension funds from companies profiting from the illegal occupation of Palestine.³¹ These developments have provoked an intense struggle within church bodies, not only in the US but in Western Europe, South America, and South Africa. Dominating this discourse is the effect on relationships between Christians and Jews on individual and institutional levels. Two issues have fuelled the controversy. The first is the charge by voices in both Jewish and Christian institutional circles that challenges to Israel's policies, even on human rights grounds, will disrupt the hard-won project of post-World War II Christian-Jewish reconciliation, and that they run counter to the spirit and praxis of Christian penitence for historic church anti-Semitism. The second is the emergence of a theological debate about kairos theology itself. The confession in the US *Kairos Call to Action* expresses clearly the centrality of these issues: 'We have allowed to go unchallenged theological and political ideas that have made us complicit in the oppression of the Palestinian people. Instead of speaking and acting boldly, we have chosen to offer careful statements designed to avoid controversy and leave cherished relationships undisturbed.'³²

Christian-Jewish 'interfaith' dialogue was originally undertaken to break down age-old barriers of fear and mistrust between the two communities. Shocked and horrified by the Nazi programme to exterminate European Jewry, church leaders and theologians in the post-World War II period struggled to come to terms with the consequences of Christian anti-Jewish doctrine. This intensive project of penitence and self-scrutiny quickly spread throughout Western Europe and to the United States, resulting in a fundamental revision of reformed theology with respect to the understanding of the place of Judaism in Christian thought and practice, as well as a powerful impulse toward reconciliation with the Jewish people. Combatting anti-Judaism became a primary concern. 'Anti-Jewishness', wrote contemporary Protestant theologian Robert T. Osborne, 'is the Christian

³¹ Church bodies and leaders have also begun to advocate directly with the US government regarding policy toward Israel. On 5 October, 2012, fifteen leaders of US Protestant denominations and several Roman Catholic orders published an open letter to the members of the US Congress. The letter reads: 'As Christian leaders in the United States, it is our moral responsibility to question the continuation of unconditional US financial assistance to the government of Israel. Realizing a just and lasting peace will require this accountability, as continued US military assistance to Israel — offered without conditions or accountability — will only serve to sustain the status quo and Israel's military occupation of the Palestinian territories.' The letter urged Congress to conduct 'an immediate investigation into possible violations the US Foreign Assistance Act and the US Arms Export Control Act which respectively prohibit assistance to any country which engages in a consistent pattern of human rights violations and limit the use of US weapons to 'internal security' or 'legitimate self-defense.' <http://www.ecclesio.com/2013/05/response-to-kairos-palestine-%E2%80%9Cthe-letter-of-15%E2%80%9D-and-the-use-of-u-s-military-aid-by-israel-in-palestine-katherine-cunningham/#sthash.JHKGL8YC.dpuf>, accessed 30 April, 2014.

³² Kairos USA. 'Call to Action'.

sin.’³³ Note that Osborne does not say that anti-Judaism is *a* sin. Rather, anti-Jewishness had taken first place as *the* Christian transgression. Correcting it would require a fundamental overhaul of the faith. A deep and wide-ranging philojudaism that arose among Christian scholars and writers in the aftermath of World War II served as both a renunciation of and atonement for historic church anti-Semitism. For Paul Tillich, Krister Stendahl, Reinhold Niebuhr and the American-born Protestant theologians who followed them, notably Paul van Buren and Franklin Littell, forging a positive relationship with Judaism and the Jewish people required nothing less than the re-imagining of what it means to be Christian. ‘If the church stops thinking of the Jews as the rejected remnant of the people Israel’, van Buren wrote, ‘if it starts speaking of the continuing covenantal relationship between this people and God, then it will have to rethink its own identity.’³⁴ Near the end of his life, van Buren called for ‘the church’s reversal of its position on Judaism from that of anti-Judaism to that of an acknowledgement of the eternal covenant between God and Israel.’ ‘Christianity’, he wrote, ‘must refer to Judaism in order to make sense of itself.’³⁵ For the Roman Catholic Church, Vatican II in 1965 was a watershed event, as the Church undertook a long overdue examination of its attitudes toward the Jewish people. While not reaching the levels of theological reversal on the subject of the divine covenant as these post-war Protestant thinkers, Vatican II opened the way for the creation of strong bonds of political support between the Holy See and the State of Israel, culminating in the visit of John Paul II to Israel in 2000. Visiting the Western Wall, revered by Jews as the only physical remnant of the Temple destroyed in 70 CE, the Pope inserted a note beseeching God for forgiveness for Christian persecution of Jews and ‘commit[ing] ourselves to genuine brotherhood with the people of the Covenant.’³⁶

A key outcome of this urgent, penitential movement on the part of the church was a conflation of Zionism with Judaism. In the theological realm, a wholesale rejection of supersessionism, also known as replacement theology, brought with it an endorsement of Zionism in what might be termed a ‘soft eschatology’ that asserted that the creation of the State of Israel, as the ‘return’ of the Jewish people to their homeland, was proof of

³³ Robert T. Osborn, ‘The Christian Blasphemy: A non-Jewish Jesus’ in James H Chatsworth (ed.) *Jews and Christians: Exploring the Past, Present, and Future* (New York: Crossroad, 1990), p. 214.

³⁴ Paul van Buren, ‘The Jewish People in Christian Theology: Present and Future’ in Darrell J. Fasching (ed.), *The Jewish People in Christian Preaching* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellon Press, 1984), p. 23.

³⁵ In James H. Wallis, *Post-Holocaust Christianity: Paul van Buren’s Theology of the Jewish-Christian Reality* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1997), p. 85.

³⁶ ‘Pope John Paul II Visit to Israel’ <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/anti-semitism/jp.html>, accessed 12 April, 2014.

God's love for the Jewish people.³⁷ Continuing to the present day, the Christian project of penitence and reconciliation has morphed into an interfaith industry that supports, not only a compelling form of Jewish exceptionalism, but, ironically, the very same Christian triumphalism that fuelled the anti-Jewish sins of the church from its earliest history. It has put institutional Christianity on a slippery slope to the theological endorsement of political Zionism. What we have in the current support of the institutional church for the State of Israel as the Jewish state and in the varied forms of Christian Zionism to be found across the theological spectrum is a potent Judeo-Christian triumphalism, and its language is Zionism.

The rules

Today, Christian-Jewish dialogue in church, synagogue and community settings as well as in academic departments devoted to interfaith, conflict resolution and peace studies observes unwritten rules that serve to insulate Christians from any charge of harbouring or promoting anti-Jewish feeling and to reassure Jews that there will be no challenge to unqualified support for the State of Israel or to the validity of the Zionist project. These are observed in the academy, in the pulpit, and in everyday encounters. They are rendered more powerful for never being stated or acknowledged. There are two primary rules:

1. 'Sensitivity' to 'the Jewish perspective' and Jewish self-perception (as defined for all Jews by those who claim to represent all Jews) is paramount. Jewish experience and Jewish needs, again, as defined by some Jews for all Jews, determine the direction and nature of the discourse. A key element of this version of Jewish self-definition is an unquestioning identification of Jewishness with commitment to the State of Israel as the Jewish homeland in Palestine.

2. The superior right of the Jews to the land is not to be challenged. One may talk about Palestinian human rights, but one may never take this so far as to question fundamental Zionist assumptions. This rule holds true for everyday conversations, coverage in the media and the public forum, and in particular in the academy. Several examples from Jewish and Christian

³⁷ The historical validity of this narrative of return, including the Exodus from Egypt, the notion of exile after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, and the genealogical link between modern Jews and the ancient Israelites, has been challenged by modern Jewish Israeli scholarship. See Neil Asher Silberman and Israel Finkelstein, *Israel, the Bible Unearthed, Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of its Sacred Texts* (New York: Touchstone, 2002) and Shlomo Sand and Yael Yotan, *The Invention of the Jewish People* (London: Verso, 2009).

scholars working in the interfaith arena will serve to illustrate how these rules are applied. Almost entirely unchallenged, they effectively determine the public discourse, the limits of expression in the academy, and boundaries of what is allowable in the practice of 'interfaith dialogue'.

Ruth Langer is a Reform Rabbi, Professor of Jewish Studies and Associate Director, Centre for Christian-Jewish Learning at Boston College. In 2008 she published 'Theologies of the Land and the State of Israel: The Role of the Secular in Jewish and Christian Understandings'. In this paper Langer invokes the first rule: that Christians must accept 'Jewish self-understanding' regarding Jewish identity and the land of Israel as definitional and unassailable. 'Christians', writes Langer, 'must strive to learn by what essential traits Jews define ... Christian-Jewish dialogue. In terms of...the development of adequate theologies of the land and State of Israel within the context of the contemporary dialogue, this is a crucial first step.'³⁸ For Langer Jewish self-experience is characterised by two unquestioned, core principles: (1) The Jewish attachment to the Land of Israel as a Jewish homeland is an essential element of being Jewish – it cannot be questioned. (2) The Jewish experience of being a 'people apart' is definitional. Langer argues that the failure of the Enlightenment to bring Jews fully into Western society is evidence that this quality of Jewish-ness is essential for Jewish survival and is inalienable with respect to Jewish identity. She ignores the diversity of Jewish experience on both these axes. For Langer, any Jew who disagrees with this description of Jewish experience is in flight from his or her Jewish identity, as were those Jews who sought to assimilate in order to curry favour and advantage with the dominant Christian society in which they lived, or worse, actually converted to Christianity. Assimilation, Langer maintains, proved to be a fruitless and ultimately dangerous strategy. Although many Jews had attempted to shed their particularism, economic and social marginalisation interspersed with periodic and often murderous violence forced them back into a separatist - and ultimately nationalist - stance. The fact of the Nazi genocide provided conclusive support for those who advance this analysis. This argument from history is central in defending the Zionist project against those who would question its validity, sustainability, morality or logic.

The use of history to determine the shape and limits of Christian-Jewish dialogue takes second place only to the imperative to repudiate replacement theology. The June 2009 issue of *CrossCurrents*, a quarterly on religion with a progressive bent and an emphasis on interfaith discourse, was entitled 'The Scandal of Particularity'. The issue's title, which features articles by Jewish, Catholic and Protestant authors, suggests a critical

³⁸ Ruth Langer, 'Theologies of the Land and State of Israel: The Role of the Secular in Christian and Jewish Understandings', *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 3 (2008), pp. 1-17.

analysis of the claim of any religion to a superior or exclusive path to God. But only Christian particularity is targeted in the publication. In contrast, Jewish particularity, rather than being challenged, is strongly supported throughout the issue, providing a theological and spiritual basis for an exclusive Jewish claim to the land. In one article, William Plevan, a rabbi and student of theology at Princeton Seminary, draws heavily on the anti-supersessionist work of Orthodox Jewish theologian Michael Wyschogrod. 'Wyschograd argued', writes Plevan, 'that the *central theological concept of Judaism* is God's election of Israel to God's beloved people. While God demands that Israel observe the commandments and while certain beliefs about God's nature may be implicit in the Biblical record, the essence of divine election is not the commandments or any beliefs about God, but rather *God's preferential and parental love of the carnal family of Israel*, the flesh and blood descendants of Jacob' (emphasis added).³⁹ According to Plevan, this exclusivist core is essential to interpreting the message of the Gospel. 'The incarnation of God in Jesus Christ', he claims, 'actually has roots in Jewish ideas, such as God's presence in the people Israel.' The Temple, although physically gone, is preserved as symbol of landedness and Jewish exclusivity. A piece by Rabbi Nina Beth Cardin entitled 'The Place of 'Place' in Jewish tradition' advances a claim that although the land has a spiritual and psychological meaning, this '*nod to the universal does not cancel out the particular*' (emphasis in the original). Jewish life, asserts Cardin, is 'all bound up in that particular bit of land on the east coast of the Mediterranean Sea.'⁴⁰

A centrepiece of the *CrossCurrents* issue is the article by John T. Pawlikowski, a prominent Catholic theologian and Director of the Catholic-Jewish Studies Program at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago. In his piece entitled 'Land as an Issue in Christian-Jewish Dialogue', Pawlikowski asserts that the Vatican's 1993 recognition of the State of Israel was pivotal in correcting Christianity's historic anti-Judaism. With that act, he wrote, 'the coffin on displacement/perpetual wandering theology had been finally sealed.'⁴¹ We must pay attention to what is being done here: recognizing the Jewish state corrects Christian theology! But there is more: Pawlikowski goes on to critique - in fact to repudiate - Christianity's spiritualization of the land, taking issue with 'efforts by Christian theologians to replace a supposedly exclusive Jewish emphasis on 'earthly' Israel with a stress on a 'heavenly' Jerusalem and an eschatological Zion.'⁴² Such a transformation

³⁹ William Plevan, 'Meet the New Paul, Same as the Old Paul: Michael Wychograd, Kendall Soulen, and the New Problem of Supersessionism', *Cross Currents* 59(2) (2009), pp. 217–228.

⁴⁰ Nina Beth Cardin, 'The Place of 'Place' in Jewish Tradition', *Cross Currents* 59 (2) (2009), pp. 210–216.

⁴¹ John T. Pawlikowski, 'Land as an Issue in Christian-Jewish Dialogue', *Cross Currents* 59 (2) (2009), pp. 197–209.

⁴² Pawlikowski, p. 199.

of the concept of land from the territorial and tribal to the spiritual and universal, argues Pawlikowski, goes against God's intention of granting the Jewish people special privileges and exclusive rights of ownership. He continues:

[T]his tendency has the effect of neutralizing (if not actually undercutting) *continued Jewish claims*. The bottom line of this theological approach is without question that the *authentic claims to the land* had now passed over into the hands of the Christians. Jerusalem, spiritually and territorially, now belonged to the Christians (emphases added).⁴³

One might expect such a statement from the pen of a Jewish scholar, but it is astonishing that such an argument should emanate from a mainline Christian theologian. In the Christian vision, Jerusalem ceased to be seen as a geographical location and the capital of an earthly kingdom. Instead, in a radical move, it was transformed into the symbol of a new world order in which God's love was available to all of humankind. The Christian vision clarified the meaning of the land promise in the covenantal relationship, removing any ambiguity about possession or ownership.⁴⁴ But Pawlikowski was now maintaining that the spiritualisation of the land was a betrayal of God's covenant with the Jews, that it had in effect deprived them of their birthright. According to this assertion, it was now incumbent upon Christians to honour the claim of the Jewish people to the Holy Land, and indeed to Jerusalem itself. This amounts to a reversal of a core element of the faith. The birth of the church was accompanied by the rejection of the idolatry of Temple, conquest, and land possession. In so doing the followers of Jesus brought to bear the full power of the prophetic tradition, opposing, in Walter Brueggemann's terms, the royal consciousness that seeks only to maintain itself at the expense of community life and social justice.⁴⁵

In the synoptic gospels accounts (Mark 13:2; Matthew 24:2), Jesus stands before the Temple and says: "Not one stone will be left upon another!" Translation: *the old order of worship tied to a physical location, this devotion to the divine yoked to nationhood and territoriality, is over*. In the Fourth Gospel (John 2:21), when Jesus says "Destroy this Temple and in three days I will raise it up," the narrator, in an unusual gloss, as if to ensure that the reader understands the theological and political meaning of Jesus' statement, explains: "He spoke of the temple of his body." *Body of Christ*: humankind united in one community of love and compassion. Jesus was making a statement about the nature of the Kingdom that would come to replace the tyrannous system that ruled his people. It was the same proclamation by

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ See Gary Burge, *Jesus and the Land: The New Testament Challenge to "Holy Land" Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010).

⁴⁵ Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001).

which he had initiated his ministry three years before in the synagogue in Nazareth. This message is also the point of the Pentecost story. The apostles, having been instructed by the risen Jesus to remain in Jerusalem, are expecting the restoration of political independence to Israel. When the day of Pentecost arrives however, they learn that it was not the power of an earthly kingdom that would be conferred. Rather, having been granted power by the Holy Spirit to speak all the languages of the world, they were to go out to be “my witnesses in Jerusalem and in Judea and Samaria,” *and not stop there*. Rather, it was to ‘the ends of the earth’ that they must go. *It was not about restoring the kingdom to Israel*. It was not a restoration at all, not a return to a former state of glory or stability, *not that kind of power*. From the kingdom of Israel we have moved to the ends of the earth – all peoples, all humanity, all the earth.

But now, in a collective act of penance and in a drive for self-purification, Christians have been engaged in what amounts to a renunciation of this fundamental principle. Generations of pastors and theologians in the West have been educated in versions of this revised theology. The Christian impulse for reconciliation has morphed into a theology that grants legitimacy to an anachronistic, ethnic-nationalist ideology that has hijacked Judaism, continues to fuel global conflict, and has produced one of the most systematic and longstanding violations of human rights in the world today.

The project to discredit Kairos theology and neutralise the voice of Palestinian Christians

This theology has been called into service by the Jewish establishment and by elements within the churches in order to suppress principled opposition to Israel’s human rights violations, acts that include efforts within mainline Protestant denominations to divest from companies profiting from the illegal occupation of Palestinian lands. But a powerful challenge to this theology has appeared in the form of the Palestine Kairos document. *A Moment of Truth* refutes not only postwar revisionist theology and its exceptionalist assumptions, but in clearly describing the historic and current violation of Palestinian rights, it disputes the narrative of a victimised, innocent Israel threatened by the implacable hatred of the Arab nations. Taken up for study by churches worldwide and having effectively activated a global church movement in support of Palestinian rights, this historic document represents a serious challenge to church endorsement of the Zionist project. The widening acceptance of the *Kairos Palestine* document has lent impetus to a campaign mounted by Jewish and Christian organisations in the US, supported financially by and working in concert with the State of Israel, to shut down what is perceived – accurately – as the rebellion of some

Christians against the status quo of silence before Israeli human rights abuses if not outright support for Jewish exceptionalism. This effort to discredit the document as political unacceptable and theologically unsound has been undertaken in coordination with Jewish and Christian theologians, academics and clergy.

In early 2010, the Reut Institute, an Israeli think tank that provides strategic support to the Israeli government, citing the growing threat to 'Israel's international legitimacy', issued a report urging the Israeli government to make combating this threat a priority. The report cited the Palestinian civil society call for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions,⁴⁶ ongoing efforts within US Protestant denominations to divest from companies profiting from the occupation of Palestinian lands, and the appearance of the Kairos document, describing these as efforts to 'demonize' Israel, 'undermine Israel's right to exist', and to isolate it as pariah state.⁴⁷ Later that year, the Israel Action Network (IAN) was created as a strategic initiative to 'counter the assault on Israel's legitimacy.'⁴⁸ Described as a strategic initiative of The Jewish Federations of North America in partnership with the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, the IAN's mission as stated on its website is to 'organize and mobilize the organized North American Jewish community to develop strategic approaches to countering these assaults.'⁴⁹ In effect, the IAN attempts to drive a theological wedge between Palestinian Christians and Christians in the West, especially in North America, who have begun to challenge the narrative of Israeli victimhood and Jewish innocence.⁵⁰ Information provided by the IAN through telecasts, guest speakers and material on its website instructs Jews on how to deal with Christians who, according to the IAN, are being misled into activities that are anti-Semitic and that threaten the State of Israel and the survival of the Jewish people. *Kairos Palestine*, it maintains, is not only anti-Semitic but is in error religiously. According to the IAN, well-intentioned but naïve Christians have been misled by 'Palestinian' anti-Jewish theology. The Palestinian Christians, pursuing their own, clearly anti-

⁴⁶ 'Palestinian Civil Society Call for BDS', <http://www.bdsmovement.net/call>, accessed 26 June, 2014.

⁴⁷ Reut Institute, 'Eroding Israel's legitimacy in the international arena', <http://reut-institute.org/en/Publication.aspx?PublicationId=3766>, accessed 12 January, 2013.

⁴⁸ Israel Action Network, <http://israelactionnetwork.org/aboutus>, accessed 12 January, 2013.

⁴⁹ According to Omar Barghouti, Palestinian human rights activist and founder of the Palestinian Committee for Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI), the term 'deligitimization' was first used by the Reut Institute, 'warning that boycott is a 'strategic threat,' even an 'existential threat' to the state.' Omar Barghouti, *Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions: The Global Struggle for Palestinian Rights* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2011), p.15.

⁵⁰ The concept of Jewish innocence has been articulated by Jewish liberation theologian Marc Ellis, *Beyond Innocence and Redemption: Confronting the Holocaust and Israeli Power* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1990), and Mark Braverman, *Fatal Embrace: Christians, Jews and the Search for Peace in the Holy Land* (New York: Beaufort, 2012).

Israel and thus anti-Semitic agenda, are to be disqualified as fellow Christians in need, crying out to the body of Christ outside Palestine.

In a 2011 telecast intended to instruct Jewish community leaders on how to understand and combat the Kairos document, one speaker for the IAN characterised *Kairos Palestine* as ‘elevating’ Palestinian Christians into a ‘pure form’ of Christianity, and as such granting special status and authority to the anti-Jewish statements and anti-Jewish theology contained in the Kairos document. This is troubling, they maintained, because American Christians have ‘worked so hard to remove anti-Judaism from their theology’. Misguided ‘liberal Protestants’, therefore, are now threatening their hard-won friendship with the Jewish people and abandoning their vigilance against anti-Semitism because they have come under the influence of the Palestinian Christians. As evidence of the anti-Jewish nature of the Palestinian call, one of the Jewish scholars featured on the telecast quoted the statement in *Kairos Palestine* that reads: ‘God is on the side of the oppressed, and the oppressed here are the Palestinians.’⁵¹ There can be no clearer indication of the crisis that the church now faces than that a statement as eminently true as this is offered as an indictment of the call to world Christians to stand in faithfulness to their core beliefs.

As the voice of Palestinian Christians becomes more prominent in the United States, through study of the *Kairos Palestine* document, the publication in 2012 of the US Kairos document *Call to Action, a US Response to the Kairos Palestine Document*, the work of Friends of Sabeel North America⁵² and denominational and church-linked grassroots organisations throughout the United States, the efforts of the IAN and similar groups have intensified, their message targeting Palestinian Christian theology explicitly. What is notable here is that these Jewish scholars are not simply articulating a point of view – they are presuming to instruct Christians *in Christians’ own theology*. They have been assisted in this by prominent Christian theologians and church leaders who have acceded to the unwritten rule that sensitivity to how Jews see themselves trumps all other considerations with respect to Zionism and the State of Israel. This interfaith dynamic boasts an impressive pedigree. The iconic Protestant theologian Krister Stendahl articulated this in his caution to Christians against coming between the Jews and their national homeland project in a 1981 interview in

⁵¹ http://engage.jewishpublicaffairs.org/p/salsa/web/blog/public/entries?campaign_manager_KEY=12009, accessed 12 January, 2012. Although this link no longer connects with the telecast, similar perspectives from the Israel Action Network can be found in its downloadable booklet, ‘Best Practices’ (2013), at http://israelactionnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/JFNA-FACTs2_finalllores-.pdf, accessed 26 June, 2014.

⁵² <http://fosna.org/>

the *Christian Science Monitor*, in which he urged Christians never to ‘break the first rule of dialogue: Listen to how the other party defines itself.’⁵³

The Gospels at stake

Christian seminaries in the United States have become centres for the promotion of Jewish exceptionalism and Zionist claims. In some cases, Jewish scholars play key roles in this phenomenon. Amy Jill Levine is Professor of New Testament Studies at Vanderbilt Divinity School. As a Jewish professor at a Protestant Seminary, her authority in the area of Christian-Jewish relations is unchallenged. Levine presents her views on Christian-Jewish relations in her 2006 book, *The Misunderstood Jew: The Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus*. The stated purpose of the book is to dispute the depiction of Jesus as one who stood in opposition to the Jewish priestly and monarchical leadership in Jerusalem. Levine argues that this is a Christian view that erases Jesus’ Jewishness and that laid the groundwork for the distorted picture of Judaism that became the basis for Christian anti-Semitism. Levine’s objective is to rehabilitate first century Judaism by presenting the picture of ‘a quite observant Jesus’, aligned with the Judaism of his time. This argument has important implications for the interfaith discourse today. In asking us to focus on the Jesus who throughout church history was used as a way to persecute Jews rather than the Jesus who in his ministry stood up to the Jewish power structure’s betrayal of Jewish values, Levine has changed the subject from Jewish responsibility to Jewish suffering. In her analysis, Levine takes direct aim at Palestinian Anglican Canon Naim Ateek of the Jerusalem-based Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Centre:

When forms of Palestinian liberation theology appropriate Jesus for political ends, the messages conveyed about the Middle East to churches there and abroad become even more complicated. Any writing that separates Jesus and his first followers from Jewish identity, associates these proto-Christians with the Palestinian population, and reserves the label ‘Jew’ for those who crucified Jesus and persecuted the church is not only historically untenable but theologically abhorrent.⁵⁴

Palestinian liberation theology has nothing to say about Jesus’ Jewish identity beyond simply stating it as a fact: Jesus was a Palestinian Jew living under Roman occupation. But because the subject is Israel, Jewish writers such as Levine now raise it as a central concern, apparently able to

⁵³ Paul Verduin, ‘Praiseworthy intentions, unintended consequences: Why Krister Stendahl’s quest for ‘healthy relations’ between Jews and Christians ended tragically’, in Carole Monica Burnett (ed.), *Zionism Through Christian Lenses* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2013), p. 148.

⁵⁴ Amy Jill Levine, *The Misunderstood Jew: The Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus* (New York: Harper One, 2006), p.181.

understand the first century context as well as the current situation in Palestine only through the lens of 2000 years of Christian persecution of Jews. What is it that Levine finds historically untenable? The Jews of Jesus' time, i.e. the Palestinians of the day, Jesus among them, were an oppressed, occupied people, as are the Palestinians of our time. Jesus directly challenged the Jewish establishment for its collaboration with the system that oppressed them.⁵⁵ Indeed, the case can be made that Jesus, far from having separated himself from his Jewish identity, was steadfastly faithful to the heart of the tradition in his opposition to the corruption and greed of the system in power in Jerusalem.⁵⁶ As for Levine's characterisation of Ateek's theology as 'abhorrent', this is an oblique reference to the use of the deicide charge in the Middle Ages and indeed well into the nineteenth century to stir up anti-Jewish feeling, with horrific consequences. Levine quotes Ateek's 2001 Easter message in which he states that 'it seems to many of us that Jesus is on the cross again with thousands of crucified Palestinians around him...the Israeli crucifixion machine is operating daily.'⁵⁷ Yes, these are strong words – and it is classic liberation theology. The poor and dispossessed are Jesus on the cross. Liberation theology's 'option for the poor' requires that we understand Jesus' message and sacrifice as connected directly to the suffering of the oppressed. When, in speaking about the Palestinians, Ateek evokes Jesus on the cross, he is not attempting to induce anti-Jewish feeling by reviving the medieval deicide charge any more than Central and South American liberation theologians were doing so in employing the same imagery in their articulation of the preferential option for the poor as the heart of Christianity. Levine is tarring a theological formulation arising from a contemporary context with the brush of historic church anti-Semitism.

Levine would argue that regardless of whether or not Ateek is anti-Jewish or intends to stir up anti-Jewish feeling, this imagery should be avoided as inherently anti-Semitic. Her demand, however, amounts to a silencing of the Palestinian voice. Palestinian liberation theology is a form of non-violent resistance, emerging directly from the Palestinian struggle. In liberation theology there is an oppressor and there is an oppressed. And the oppressor is the centurion stabbing the suffering, naked man on the cross and the oppressed is the suffering, naked man on the cross. In this instance, the oppressor is the government of the Jewish state and the oppressed are the

⁵⁵ See Nolan (1976) on the 'handing over' of Jesus to the Roman authorities by the Jewish authorities. Citing the account in John of the plot to have Jesus arrested (11:47-50), in which the High Priest argues that 'it is better for one man to die than the whole nation be destroyed', Nolan emphasizes the extent to which the Temple establishment was invested in maintaining the power granted to them by Rome. Jesus was executed as a political criminal, his crime being the claim – as understood by Rome – to kingship. The protection of Roman rule over Palestine was essential to the continuation of the power of the Temple hierarchy and the Jewish client monarchs.

⁵⁶ Mark Braverman, *A Wall in Jerusalem: Hope, Healing and the Struggle for Justice in Israel and Palestine* (Nashville: Jericho Books, 2013).

⁵⁷ Levine, p. 183.

Palestinians. That this theology has emerged from the Palestinian Christian community is theologically coherent and inescapable. It is, inevitably and by its nature, a source of discomfort for the community and power structure to which it is addressed. Could liberation theology imagery applied to Israel and the Palestinians be used by anti-Semites? Does it evoke horrific associations for Jews? The first is possible, and the second is certainly true, as exemplified by Levine's argument. But Palestinian liberation theologians cannot be held hostage to these realities. *We – the Jewish people – set this up.* We did so by declaring a Jewish state established on the ruins of Palestinian towns and villages, a state founded on the basis of a political ideology that by its nature set in motion an ongoing programme of dispossession and ethnic cleansing of a subject population. A well-organized network of Jewish advocacy and religious organisations compounds and continues the oppression by denying that crimes have been committed and by failing to admit the catastrophic misguided-ness and ultimate unsustainability of the project to establish a majority Jewish state in historic Palestine. This tragic and stubborn denial, supported diplomatically by the United States and its Western allies, blocks meaningful political movement and has allowed the human rights situation to continually worsen over the sixty-six years since the establishment of the State of Israel.

Somebody is always not going to like somebody's liberation theology.

Liberation theology was demonised and marginalised by the Roman Catholic church when it emerged in Latin America in connection with popular movements that opposed the oppressive power structures with which the institutional church was actively or passively allied. Today, Palestinian liberation theology is being vilified as archaic and anti-Jewish by Jewish as well as Christian scholars, and for the same reason: because at its core, it challenges a structure of domination and authority that serves to protect the powerful and the privileged classes. This is why the Palestine issue is so important. It is not only the Palestinian voice that is being silenced, and not only the dispossession of the Palestinian people at the hands of a colonial settler project that is being brought into the light of day. Palestine is part of the larger picture of global economic-military dominance. Writing about Kairos movements in the late 20th century, US theologian Robert MacAfee Brown never addressed in writing the story of Palestine – but I believe that if he were alive today Brown would see the present course clearly, because he understood so well the legacy of his own country's pursuit of global economic hegemony and how that has driven its illegal and immoral policies throughout the world. He would have had to contemplate the US government's financial and diplomatic support of Israeli apartheid. *We Americans*, he would point out, have built the wall that cuts Palestinians off from their own land and that imprisons Israelis within their fortress of fear.

That wall is *our* wall -- *our* hegemonic, racist frontier. Unpack the story of Palestine today, and what appears is the broader picture of Western economic imperialism. The power of the Palestinian cause is how it shines a light on the global context of Empire.

It is important not to underestimate how theology has been used to legitimize the colonisation of Palestine. Levine's bid to recover what she characterises as Jesus' Jewishness in the service of continuing the fight against anti-Semitism – and her significant influence in interfaith circles as well as in the education of both Christian and Jewish clergy - is an important example of how one particular Jewish perspective has come to dominate the interfaith conversation, and how it has been used to block the theological exploration needed to free both church and academy to become agents of change. The urgent issue confronting us today is not anti-Semitism. It is, rather, whether we will commit our efforts to the expansion of empire or to the building of community, to tolerating and even supporting tyranny or to committing ourselves to equality on a global scale. The Christians and Jews who have attacked the *Kairos Palestine* document and the global movement of discipleship that it has spawned are more interested in detecting evidence of replacement theology and anything that might be connected to the history of Christian anti-Semitism than in confronting the way theology is being used today to justify the dispossession of the Palestinians.

There is much more at stake here, therefore, than the church's support for Palestinian human rights. South African theologian Allen Boesak puts it this way in a recent essay entitled 'Kairos Consciousness': 'There are those Christians', he writes,

and sometimes whole hierarchies of churches, who seek to use the Bible, the tradition and theology to serve and protect to the detriment of the poor, the weak and the vulnerable. On the other side of the conflict are those with a Kairos consciousness – who understand God's call as a call to commit themselves to justice and the liberation of the oppressed... Much more than only the liberation of the oppressed is at stake here...the integrity of the Gospel, and the credibility of the witness of the church are at stake here. The moment of truth is a moment to act for the sake of justice and humanity, but also *for the sake of the integrity of the Gospel* (emphasis added).⁵⁸

The new ecumenicism: Creating the Beloved Community

How do we resist the seductions of gradualism and of reform when used to block genuine change in human affairs? Kairos addresses this question by

⁵⁸ Allan Boesak, 'Kairos Consciousness.' *Kairos Southern Africa* (25 March, 2011), <http://kairossouthernafrica.wordpress.com/kairos-consciousness/>.

making it clear that prophecy follows from confession – from the acknowledgement that we have failed to live up to our most cherished and foundational principles. This is, after all, what prophets demand, and they do their work in the marketplaces, at the gates of the city, and even, perhaps especially, in the Temple courtyard: the centres of religious and political power. As Boesak points out, this reaches beyond the struggle for human rights in one particular context. What is at stake is the nature and mission of the church itself: Jesus' message of the Kingdom of God, first articulated in response to a specific societal crisis, but with universal and timeless significance. 'The mission of the Church is prophetic,' states the *Kairos Palestine* document: 'to speak the Word of God courageously, honestly and lovingly in the local context and in the midst of daily events.'⁵⁹ Catholic priest and historian of Liberation Theology Phillip Berryman recounts a historic 1978 meeting of theologians in Caracas, Venezuela, who sought to address the objections of the Catholic Church to the community-based theology that was emerging. 'For millions of people in Latin America', writes Berryman of the Caracas deliberations, ideologies 'are a matter of life and death.' Active involvement at the community level, where people live, die, and suffer, must promote a theology that 'takes sides and stands with the poor and the oppressed.' The suffering communities themselves thus become 'the concrete bearers of liberation in history.'⁶⁰ 'Our starting point', wrote Catholic priest and *South Africa Kairos* author Albert Nolan in *Jesus Before Christianity*, 'is the urgent reality of our present historical situation....If we cannot achieve an unobstructed view of Jesus from the vantage point of our current circumstances, then we cannot obtain an unobstructed view of him at all.'⁶¹

The act of creating a Kairos document connects those who have been working for justice within their own congregations, communities and denominations, but in isolation from one another. This is not an 'ecumenical' movement in the sense that the word is often employed, a kind of United Nations of churches, each sitting at the table behind her or his denominational name card, but a return to the model of the church as a holy community committed to building a just society. It is ecumenical in the sense of a single body united in a faithful ministry. Professor of Mennonite Theology at the Free University in Amsterdam and the Director of the Institute of Peace Church Theology at the University of Hamburg Fernando Enns submits that '[t]he Christian's unconditional commitment to peace and justice is not based on some humanistic notion of individual freedom, but rather rests on faith convictions that we share in the community of that

⁵⁹ Kairos Palestine. 'A Moment of Truth'.

⁶⁰ Phillip Berryman, *Liberation Theology: The Essential Facts about the Revolutionary Movement in Latin America and Beyond* (New York: Pantheon, 1987), pp. 132, 133.

⁶¹ Albert Nolan, *Jesus Before Christianity*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1976).

ecumenical fellowship which is called to live in accordance with this understanding of holiness...an open space for self-development within a community are the preconditions for building a culture of peace.’⁶² Kairos reminds us that this is the heart of the church: the Holy Spirit conferring upon the community the power to make disciples of the nations, in order to bring about the Kingdom of God here on earth.

This is, of course, a radical departure from both the doctrinal and practical realities of our current church institutions, a church today, in theologian Duncan Forrester’s direct but also hopeful words, plagued by ‘faithless self-obsession...seek[ing] once more to fulfil its mission in the world...extraordinary in its inclusiveness and calling, nurturing expectation, hope and reconciliation.’⁶³ Discussing Kairos, liberation theologian Robert MacAfee Brown placed it within the broader context of a fundamental shift in the church – he called it a ‘second reformation’ – moving away from the idea of personal salvation through a narrow and individually-framed notion of faith and toward a vision of a ministry of care for the poor and the vulnerable. It is, in the words of *Road to Damascus*, ‘a call to conversion to those who have strayed from the truth of Christian faith and commitment.’⁶⁴ South African theologian and *South Africa Kairos* document author Charles Villa-Vicencio asks whether a prophetic drive can penetrate the institutional church, a church trapped in the dominant structures of oppression, conditioned by a history of having collaborated with, indeed of having joined the structures of oppression: ‘Can religion truly break the iron cage of history?’ Villa-Vicencio asks. ‘Can religion produce a qualitatively different kind of society? Is the Kingdom of God a real possibility?’⁶⁵

And the answer is yes - if the true mission of the church can be mobilised, in accordance with the kairos call. We are speaking of something very powerful with respect to the church’s role in shaping the laws and policies that direct our societies. Duncan Forrester, whose writing about public theology amounts to a passionate call to the church to be reborn into its original and core mission, laments that ‘[w]e no longer attempt to discern God’s judgment, God’s opportunity and God’s initiative in what is happening in our day....we find it hard to see that small, declining and relatively powerless churches many have a distinctive servant role to play in our kind of society, that the Church may be reborn in our age, that God continues to take the initiative if we have eyes to see.’⁶⁶

⁶² Fernando Enns and Mosher, *Just Peace: Ecumenical, Intercultural and Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2013), p. 25.

⁶³ Duncan B. Forrester, *Truthful Action: Explorations in Practical Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), p. 127.

⁶⁴ *Road to Damascus*, in Brown, p. 114

⁶⁵ Charles Villa-Vicencio, *Trapped in Apartheid* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988), p. 201.

⁶⁶ Forrester, p.131.

The Civil Rights Movement in the United States, in large part born in and carried forward by the spiritual power of the African American church, provides a powerful lesson in this regard. In 1963 the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr., jailed in Birmingham Alabama for his role in organizing protests against racial discrimination in that city, received a letter from a group of eight white Birmingham clergymen, asking him to abandon his campaign of non-violent direct action. Advocating a gradualist approach in which the policies of segregation would be reformed through a process of negotiation and compromise, the authors of 'A Call to Unity' implored King to abandon the 'extreme measures' that were disrupting this process. 'We recognize the natural impatience of people who feel that their hopes are slow in being realized', they wrote in this open letter to King, 'but we are convinced that these demonstrations are unwise and untimely.' Even when rights are 'consistently denied', they argued, 'a cause should be pressed in the courts and in negotiations among local leaders, and not in the streets.'⁶⁷ King's response, smuggled out on scraps of paper and now regarded as one of the great documents of contextual theology of the twentieth century, is well known. This is not the Christian way, he countered. There comes a time, King argued, when gradualism and reform function in the service of maintaining rather than ending an unjust system, and the church, sadly, has been complicit: 'Far from being disturbed by the presence of the church, the power structure of the average community is consoled by the church's often vocal sanction of things as they are.' King went so far as to identify the retreat to gradualism and reform as the key issue facing his movement. 'I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion', he famously wrote, 'that the Negro's great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen's Council or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate, who is more devoted to 'order' than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice.' King observed that this was the situation confronting the early Christians in their non-violent opposition to the tyranny of Rome. When the early Christians entered a town, he wrote, they were persecuted as 'outside agitators – but they persisted, knowing that they were a colony of heaven, called to obey God rather than man.' He called out a warning that speaks as loudly today as it did a half century ago:

...[T]he judgment of God is upon the church as never before. If today's church does not recapture the sacrificial spirit of the early church, it will lose its authenticity, forfeit the loyalty of millions, and be dismissed as an irrelevant social club with no meaning for the twentieth century.'⁶⁸

⁶⁷ 'A Call to Unity', Public Statement by Eight Alabama Clergyman, 12 April, 1963. http://www.massresistance.org/docs/gen/09a/mlk_day/statement.html, accessed 3 May, 2014.

⁶⁸ Martin Luther King, Jr., 'Letter from a Birmingham Jail' in Washington, James Melville, (ed.), *I have a Dream: Writings and Speeches that Changed the World* (San Francisco: Harper, 1986), p. 91.

The Church Complicit

Religion scholar Reza Aslan's *Zealot: The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth* created a stir when it was published in late 2013. Connecting Jesus with the first century movement of Judeans who advocated violent insurrection against Rome, Aslan argues that Jesus wanted to bring about a Jewish Kingdom to replace that of Rome and the Herodian dynasty installed by the Empire, and that he did not rule out armed insurrection as a means to achieve that political transformation. Aslan is correct in rejecting the image of Jesus as 'gentle preacher' that came to dominate Christian readings of the Gospels. But he is mistaken in turning to the alternative picture of Jesus as a zealot advocating violent overthrow of the Roman provincial government. Jesus' vision of the Kingdom of God was not about regime change. The Temple, not Herod's palace, was the target of the non-violent resistance movement he led: the corruption and hypocrisy of the Pharisees and scribes, not the tyranny of Rome's puppet kings. Albert Nolan points out that the real issue for Jesus was not Roman oppression but the lack of compassion in Jewish society – the gross inequalities and suffering brought about by the Temple system. The lesson of the 'Widow's mite' found in the Gospels of Mark and Luke (Mark 12:41-44, Luke 21:1-4) is offered not as a pietistic lesson about devotion and self-sacrifice – it is an expression of outrage about a system that would create such poverty and then be ready to deliver the killing stroke. When Jesus enters Jerusalem, it is the Temple before which he stands, declaring that it will be replaced with his Body – a realm of compassion and equality. On this point Nolan quotes Uruguayan Jesuit priest and liberation theologian Juan Luis Segundo:

The political life, the civic organisation of the Jewish multitudes, their burdens, their oppression ...depended much less on the Roman Empire and much more on the theology ruling in the groups of scribes and Pharisees. They, and not the Empire, imposed intolerable burdens on the weak...so establishing the true socio-political structure of Israel.⁶⁹

Of course, it is the Empire, now as it was then, a structure of economic exploitation supported by political and military power, designed to maintain an oligarchy of wealth fed by the labour of impoverished multitudes, that is responsible for mass suffering. The key word in Nolan's analysis, however, is *theology*. In a world in which the modern distinction between religion and politics did not exist, beliefs and codes based on and expressed in religion were a key component of the system that ruled everyday life. Jesus was saying that Rome's oppression would not prevail if the people were to maintain loyalty to the principles of Torah, rather than the distorted version

⁶⁹ Nolan, p. 118.

of Jewish law employed by the Jerusalem theocracy to justify and enforce a predatory Temple cult and the imperial system of taxation and tribute. The authors of *The Road to Damascus* pointed out that the Temple 'was the centre not only of religious power but also of political and economic power, while the Law was the guarantee that nothing in that society would change.'⁷⁰ Jesus' theology, like that of Howard Thurman, Martin Luther King, Jr., Bishop Oscar Romero, and the kairos documents emerging from Palestine, the Americas, Africa and Asia today, was a theology of resistance - a guide for faithful action in the face of tyranny.

Modern Zionism's incarnation as an exclusivist, triumphalist ideology justifying conquest and ethnic cleansing is, sadly, one more example of an all-too-common feature of our times. Oppressed and traumatised peoples, seeking relief from shame, suffering and humiliation, have often turned to nationalism – frequently infused with religious and messianic qualities. The church has often been instrumental, indeed complicit in the formation and political realization of these movements. In this regard, the story of the church and Nazi Germany is well-known. It is the story of a Germany politically, economically and psychologically crushed by the defeat of 1918 and its aftermath. The shame and humiliation of defeat, the physical devastation, loss of life, deprivation, hunger and sense of isolation from the larger world opened the way for a tyrannous system to take hold. Furthermore, a deep mistrust of the modernism, pluralism and liberal values of Weimar Germany made National Socialism attractive to a significant number of German church leaders, academics, and theologians, leading to the development of a full-blown *volksteologie* that served to support the new regime.⁷¹ Lutheran Paul Althaus, a prominent and respected twentieth-century German theologian, ascribed clear religious significance to the ascendancy of National Socialism. 'Our Protestant churches have greeted the turning point of 1933 as a gift and a miracle of God,' wrote Althaus in the year that Hitler and the Nazi Party came to power. '[W]e take the turning point of this year as grace from God's hand. He has saved us from the abyss and out of hopelessness. He has given us – or so we hope – a day of life.'⁷²

Although the example of the German *Reichskirche* is the most well known, this phenomenon has in no way been limited to this particular and notorious case. A brief three years after the fall of the Third Reich, with the compliance of the churches of South Africa – white and black, reformed, Catholic, and Pentecostal – and sustained by the protection and active

⁷⁰ 'Road to Damascus', in Brown, p.134.

⁷¹ See Robert P. Ericksen, *Theologians Under Hitler* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985).

⁷² In R.P. Ericksen and S. Heschel, *Betrayal: German Churches and the Holocaust* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1991), pp. 23-24.

theological support of the dominant Dutch Reformed Church, the ruling Afrikaner minority in South Africa implemented a political platform that mirrored the *volkstheologie* that had been served up by Germany's church leaders and theologians in the Nazi years. South African historians of apartheid John and Steve DeGruchy observed: 'A defeated people need an interpretation of their history, a *mythos*, which can enable them to discover significance in what has happened to them....it is not surprising that Afrikaner history, like that of other nations, took on a sacred character...' ⁷³

'The National Party', wrote the DeGruchys, 'was itself becoming, if not a church, then a party imbued with religion – a secular religion – at its roots.'

⁷⁴ A similarly powerful religiously-informed ethic characterised the European colonisation of the Americas. The ethnic cleansing of indigenous peoples and the conduct of the African slave trade were justified by notions of divine privilege, destiny, and even obligation. And did not the Christianity of the white southerner in the United States during slavery and its aftermath in Jim Crow America serve as a civil religion, supported by selective, literalist interpretations of the Bible? And are not strands of this cultural and religious DNA still operative in the foreign and domestic policies of the world's remaining superpower?

Modern political Zionism partakes of this same cultural and historical dynamic. Like the German people after 1918 and the Afrikaners after their subjugation by the British, the besieged and battered Jews of central and eastern Europe at the close of the nineteenth century sought dignity, relief from suffering, and an antidote to the sense of disgrace and shame that comes from marginalisation and disenfranchisement. For them the idea of nationhood became a central and defining concept – the basis of, if not a theology, a form of civil religion. 'We are a people – one people', wrote Theodor Herzl, the founder of political Zionism, in 1896. 'The idea must make its way into the uttermost miserable holes where our people dwell...into all our lives will come a new meaning...I believe that a wondrous breed of Jews will spring up from the earth. We shall lie at last as free men on our own soil, and in our own homes peacefully die...The world will be liberated by our freedom, enriched by our wealth, magnified by our greatness.'⁷⁵ British psychoanalyst and critic Jacqueline Rose describes Zionism as 'one of the most potent movements of the twentieth century', with the power, she writes, 'to sacralise itself'.⁷⁶ Although its founders were not religious, the political success of Zionism in the early years of the movement was owed in no small measure to European Christian Zionism, most significantly as found in Britain. Today Israel's colonial aims are

⁷³ DeGruchy and DeGruchy, p. 29.

⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 33.

⁷⁵ T. Herzl, *The Jewish State*, 1896, in A. Hertzberg, *The Zionist Idea*, p. 225.

⁷⁶ Jacqueline Rose, *The Question of Zion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 14.

powerfully supported by religious Zionists, Jewish and Christian, on a global basis. Within Israel religious parties and religious movements effectively dictate state policy over a wide range of civil and military policies.

Theology can be used for good or for evil - mobilizing and shaping movements to end injustice or laying out the blueprint for oppression.⁷⁷ In his inaugurating proclamation, Jesus set out clearly what it means to bring God's 'opportune time' to the affairs of the world: free the captives of unjust systems, both oppressors and oppressed; open the eyes of those blinded by poverty as well as those whose vision is clouded by greed and the seduction of power. Today, as it was in Jesus' time, the battle is joined, and it is one that will be fought on theological grounds. 'The Kairos today,' writes theologian Fernando Enns, 'is similar to that of 1932 in Europe', invoking the call issued by Dietrich Bonhoeffer in that year for '[a] change in the church's understanding of itself', a change that, according to Bonhoeffer, would be demonstrated by the production of theology true to the church's calling. Enns repeats the German Lutheran's warning to the church in those times: 'If it does not succeed in this, that will be evidence that it is nothing but a new and up to date improvement in church organizations.'⁷⁸ 'It is the Kairos or moment of truth not only for apartheid but also for the church', declared the *South Africa Kairos* document, confronted with its own theological crisis, 'the time for the church to make a decision.' 'It is serious,' the document continues, 'very serious. A crisis is a moment of truth that shows us up for what we really are. There will be no place to hide and no way of pretending to be what we are not in fact. At this moment in South Africa the Church is about to be shown up for what it really is and no cover-up will be possible.'⁷⁹ In his discussion of liberation theology, Phillip Berryman emphasizes the central function of the church in articulating a theology based on human rights, in contrast to the 'implicit theology' driving the actions of repressive governments and 'the church's historical alliance with ruling classes.'⁸⁰

A Call to Discipleship

The call to discipleship was issued by Jesus, and then spread by his disciples. Today it is the Palestinians who issue this call. They summon us to

⁷⁷ Compare the European and US biblical justification for slavery with theologian Beverly Mitchell's description of the spirit of African American slaves who, out of their own suffering, even at the hands of the 'distorted gospel' of the slaveholders, 'wrought a new expression of Christianity that not only supported and enlivened the faith of African Americans, but contributed as well to the spirit and tenor of Christianity in the United States as a whole.' In C.M. Burnett (ed.), *Zionism Through Christian Lenses* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2013), pp. 109-131.

⁷⁸ Enns, p. 22.

⁷⁹ Kairos South Africa, 'Challenge to the Church'.

⁸⁰ Berryman, p. 115.

acknowledge the brokenness of our own systems and the errors in our own beliefs, and to know that we receive the power to heal ourselves and to work for the Kingdom of God by heeding the call of the oppressed. The kairos movements arising across the globe are responding to that call in the context of their own human rights struggles - in their own communities as well as in the foreign policies of their governments, bringing renewed commitment and energy to those endeavours in their embrace of liberation for the Palestinian people. By their 'word of faith, hope and love', the Palestinians stand in the tradition of Jesus' original call to discipleship. They stand in the tradition of the Latin American priests and theologians who stood against the repressive regimes of their day, the churchwomen and men of the Civil Rights movement, and the South African (and subsequently the global) church that declared itself in *status confessionis* in the face of the evil of apartheid.

Duncan Forrester reminds us that the church must renew itself continually in every historical era. 'The birth of the Church', he writes, 'wherever we locate it, was depicted in the Bible as an unambiguously public event.'⁸¹ A church thus reborn must be willing to step into uncertainty - to risk disrupting the established order as well as unsettling its own house, as it did in the crucible of its origins in the Palestine of 2000 years ago. 'The signs of the times discussed in the gospels', observes Forrester, 'are manifestations of a new order latent in the disorder of the day, ready to emerge from the womb of the past. The scribes and the Pharisees wanted a sign authenticating Jesus and the message of the Reign of God which he preached. They wanted all doubt removed.' But this was not Jesus' way, Forrester points out, not his message about how to bring human affairs into harmony with God's plan. Jesus, Forrester reminds us, reserved his harshest words for this kind of blindness: it was an 'evil and adulterous generation' that required 'proof and certainty before they decided how to respond to this strange, compelling teacher and his call to discipleship.'⁸²

When we read the story of that first Pentecost, we begin to understand that this was a process that was accompanied by anxiety and profound uncertainty. The time between Easter and Pentecost was a time of confusion for Jesus' followers. Stunned and perplexed by the events they had witnessed, they failed to comprehend the meaning of his execution and were stubbornly blind to his appearances after his death on the cross. All the way to Pentecost, they remained ignorant as to what Jesus meant by receiving power from the Holy Spirit. More than that - they got it completely wrong. As they had so many times before, they proceeded to ask the wrong question, a question that revealed that they still did not understand what Jesus had been teaching for the three and a half years of his ministry. 'Is this the time', they

⁸¹ Forrester, p. 25.

⁸² Forrester, p. 128.

asked, ‘is it now, Lord, that you will restore the kingdom to Israel?’ (Acts 1:6) Even then, they did not comprehend what Jesus meant by the Kingdom of God. Seeking the certainty of the familiar, they awaited the ‘restoration’ of yet another system of domination, ready to replace the oppression of a foreign occupier with the tyranny of their own people grasping for power and tribal hegemony.

We face similar choices today. The theocracy in place in Jerusalem betrayed (in the Greek, ‘handed over’) Jesus for the crime of speaking the truth about the sinfulness of his society. In an act of political expediency the Jewish leaders delivered him to the Roman authorities for execution in order to preserve the power relationship they enjoyed with the imperial masters. In its commitment to the Zionist programme, the State of Israel is guilty of the same folly - requiring the building of a fortress wall, the exclusion, impoverishment and demonisation of the ‘other’ with which it shares a land, and a deepening alliance with the forces and institutions of global militarism. In pursuit of its colonial and hegemonic aims, Israel has – inevitably and unavoidably – betrayed the commitment to the goal of a democratic, egalitarian society expressed in its *Declaration of Independence*. In a tragic paradox, it has thus condemned its citizens to a perpetual state of insecurity and fear. The Jewish denominations, advocacy organisations and political lobbies worldwide have been Israel’s staunch allies in this unsustainable, self-destructive project of ethnic nationalism. In that effort they too have become allied with what liberation theologian Walter Wink termed the *Domination System*: choosing the false comfort of ‘security’ and the blinkered clarity of ‘us and them’ over the hopefulness and openness of community, staking their future, along with the State of Israel, on, in Wink’s terms, the myth of redemptive violence.

In the face of these realities, can we embrace, in Forrester’s words, the ‘call to faithfulness amid the turbulence, uncertainties and opportunities’ of our times? For over six decades, the world has been asked – and largely agreed – to unquestioningly accept Jewish hegemony in Palestine, whether on the basis of a need for protection, recompense for suffering at the hands of the Christian West, a historical narrative of return from exile, or an eschatology of Biblical promise and prophecy. Like Jesus’ followers, indeed much like the Jewish leadership of that time, we want all doubt removed. Jesus was pointing them toward a new order, one that he termed the Kingdom or Realm of God, a social order of compassion and equality that represented a radical alternative to the system that ruled in his time and place. (In Jesus’ often quoted remark to Pilate, “My kingdom is not of this world”, the word usually translated ‘world’ is *kosmos*: ‘order’ or ‘system’.) But Jesus’ followers failed to understand what was before their eyes. Blind to Jesus’

vision of the new thing, they persisted in seeking a restoration of temporal power.

Across the globe, kairos movements are challenging this contemporary betrayal of fundamental Christian values, bringing Christians together in what Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. termed the Beloved Community. Bridging longstanding theological, racial and historic divides, church groups at grassroots and denominational levels are confronting their governments' complicity in Israel's human rights violations. The authors of the Philippine kairos document weigh in powerfully from their context as a nation with a long history of occupation and as church leaders carrying out their own struggle for the rights of indigenous peoples. They make the case that this is a struggle that is larger than Palestine - that stepping into the story of Palestinian resistance to dispossession and the attempted erasure of their history and very identity moves us into the broader global struggle for equality and human dignity:

[T]he Palestinian situation mirrors the many faces of suffering in our world today. The tentacles of the empire move unrestrained causing much destitution and death from Palestine to the Sulu isles. Empire-sponsored occupation of other people's lands goes with other names in other areas. They are called 'neo-colonialism', 'strong republic', 'national security state', 'democratization', etc...The Palestinian people's struggle amplifies the faith, hope, and love of resisting peoples and nations of the world...Palestine, being at the center of the world, historically, culturally, and geopolitically, is central to the many narratives of national liberation. For this reason solidarity around the Palestinian people's struggle is crucial to the formation of a truly global network for emancipatory politics.⁸³

A church reborn

The church has done it before. The church can do it again. The church was born in the reverberations of Jesus' words spoken in the first chapter of the Gospel of Mark:

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the Good News, and saying, "The kairos is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near! Repent, and believe in the Good News." (Mark 1:14–15)

Think about what Jesus' declaration means. In arresting John, Rome was trying to prevent the momentous events that he was foretelling. Taking on the mantle of prophecy, Jesus was announcing that God was breaking into

⁸³ Kairos Philippines. 'Reclaiming the good news of the holy land and the imperative of Interfaith solidarity to resist empire: a Philippine theological Response to Kairos Palestine'. <http://www.kairospalestine.ps/sites/default/Documents/A%20Philippine%20Theological%20response%20to%20Kairos%20Palestine.pdf>, Section 3.4, accessed 15 January, 2014.

history and was calling on his people to embrace the *kairos*. The call has come now, as it did in those days, to step into history. The Greek *metanoieite*, usually - and regrettably - translated as 'repent', means to change our minds, to shift our focus radically away from habitual, narrow concerns and toward the urgent needs of society. Albert Nolan defines faith as 'a change in mind and heart, a change of allegiance, a radical reorientation of one's life...a straightforward decision in favour of the Kingdom of God.'⁸⁴ John Marsh puts it this way: 'To embrace the opportunity means salvation, to neglect it disaster. There is no third choice.'⁸⁵ 'Hope', reads the *Kairos Palestine* document, 'is the capacity to see God in the midst of trouble, and to be co-workers with the Holy Spirit who is dwelling in us.'

'A church reborn', writes Forrester, 'is a church that is aware of its public identity and its public responsibilities.'⁸⁶ The birth of the church did not, as Forrester observes, take place 'quietly, in private, in the bosom of the family. There is public dislocation and disturbance from the beginning.'⁸⁷ "Do you suppose", Jesus teaches, "that I came to give peace on earth? I tell you, not at all, but rather division." (Luke 12:51) The meaning of the Greek *diamerismon* is to make a clear distinction, to take sides, to take a stand. In the words of the US Kairos *Call to Action*, it is

...to know the difference between a theology that supports the policies and institutional structures of oppression and a theology that, in response to history and human affairs, stands boldly with the widow, the orphan, the poor, and the dispossessed. It is to know the difference between actions and words that seek at all costs to preserve cherished beliefs, attitudes and relationships, and those that challenge these in order to bring about a world of love and compassion.⁸⁸

In times of urgent necessity, the church emerges as the standard bearer for universal truths and the moral imperatives that ultimately carry the day in spite of political and social forces, often supported by institutional religion, that seek to preserve unjust systems through the slowing or blocking of change. Kairos calls the church to know the difference, to make the decision for justice and discipleship, to recognize that the kingdom is ours to create here on earth.

Dr Mark Braverman, Executive Director, Kairos USA

⁸⁴ Nolan, p. 101.

⁸⁵ John Marsh, quoted in McAfee Brown, Robert (ed.), *Kairos: Three Prophetic Challenges to the Church* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1992), p. 3. (Marsh cite in Brown: quoted in Alan Richardson (ed.), *A Theological Word Book of the Bible* (London: MacMillan, 1962), p. 252.

⁸⁶ Forrester, p. 142.

⁸⁷ Forrester, p. 141.

⁸⁸ Kairos USA. 'Call to Action'.

Conversation on a Train: Reflections on the Bible and Christian Discipleship

Marion Carson

Introduction

In common with all Evangelicals, Baptists believe that the Bible is foundational for Christian living. We speak of being under the ‘authority’ of Scripture, and seek to live according to its teachings. There is, however, a spectrum of views as to how this authority operates and what it entails, and this can lead to difficulties.¹ When, as often happens, we disagree on issues of practice and doctrine, the question of the authority of Scripture comes to the fore, and divisions can arise over what it means to be ‘Biblical’.

A recent conversation I had illustrates the problem. In the course of a discussion of continuing arguments within the church regarding issues such as women in ministry and sexual ethics, my conversation partner stated that the most important thing was to be under the authority of the Bible, and to be sure that one was doing what the Bible commands. In reply, I suggested that since there may be different interpretations of Scripture, perhaps the Biblical principle of unity (I used the example of the letter to the Ephesians) might be more important. Christians should be able to agree to differ, and focus on the work of following Christ. Far from happy with this idea, my companion, a pastor of some years’ experience, replied that it was much more important to be ‘living under the truth’ – agreeing to differ was not an option if one of the parties was in error. “I would rather”, he said, “be under the authority of Scripture than be in unity with those who are not living in the truth. If I think someone is promoting ideas which are contrary to God’s command, I will stand up and fight for the truth.”

At this point the train on which we were travelling reached its destination, and probably to the relief of us both, the conversation ended. However it has stayed with me, and has troubled me. Why was I disturbed by it? I must admit I was taken aback by the vehemence with which my companion expressed his opinion. I have wondered, too, if my resort to a plea for unity was rather weak, side-stepping rather than tackling the problems which so preoccupy our churches. However, I was even more disturbed by the fact that, in such a short time, we seemed to have reached an impasse. We shared a desire to be obedient to God, to live our lives as

¹ On the question of authority see for example Walter Brueggemann, *The Book that Breathes New Life: Scriptural Authority and Biblical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005); N.T. Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God* (London: SPCK, 2005). Reflections on the range of hermeneutical stances within Baptist communities are to be found in Helen Dare & Simon Woodman (eds.), *The Plainly Revealed Word of God? Baptist Hermeneutics in Theory and Practice* (eds.) (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2011).

disciples of Christ, and a belief that God speaks to his people through the Bible. Yet we were coming to quite different conclusions. And in doing so we were touching on a question which continues to cause problems amongst believers, but which cannot be ignored – the question of the place of Scripture in the life of the church. In this paper, in deference to our Baptist ‘high’ view of Scripture, but perplexed by the wide range of opinions as to how this plays out in practice, I propose to revisit the question and to consult the Biblical canon itself to help us tackle it. What role should Scripture play in our everyday lives?

Obeying the law

For most Christians, doing what the Bible says means believing the gospel message and responding to it by living lives ‘worthy of the Lord’ (Colossians 1:10). In practice, however, this is often less than straightforward. How do we know what is pleasing to God? Our first instinct is, of course, to look for rules and instructions – and in the Bible there are plenty. Besides the Ten Commandments, there are the legal collections in Leviticus and Deuteronomy. In the New Testament, we have the instructions given by Jesus, and the parenetic sections of the epistles. However, when it comes to trying to live by these rules and instructions, it soon becomes apparent that it is very difficult, indeed impossible to do so. Are they all to be considered applicable in every time and place? What about laws which seem to be in contradiction with each other?²

Selectivity inevitably follows. We must make decisions as to which rules to obey and which to ignore. But how should we do this, and on what basis? Some decisions are made for us, of course, not least because of the difference in time between us and the Biblical world. In the West, if we were to stone someone for adultery today, we would find ourselves in court fairly quickly. Perhaps the most obvious course of action, from a Christian point of view, is to distinguish between the Old and New Testaments. Surely, the New Covenant means that we no longer need to obey the rules and regulations which are found in the Old Testament? However, it is not as simple as that, for there are some laws which we do follow – not least the Decalogue. So which laws should we ignore? One theory, following Paul’s teaching in Galatians, is that it is only the Jewish ceremonial laws which Christians need not adhere to – for example, the food laws or circumcision.³ However, there are two problems with this view. Firstly, Paul himself seems sometimes to allow for ceremonial observance amongst his

² For a light-hearted but insightful discussion of this question See A.J. Jacobs, *The Year of Living Biblically* (London: Arrow Books, 2007).

³ James D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

congregations and at other times to be against it. While much of this can be accounted for by the situational nature of his letters, this cannot explain all the difficulties.⁴ Second, this theory suggests that we must still obey Old Testament moral law. However, while it is true that many of the laws are still applicable, some of them are deeply problematic for us today, for example those with regard to slavery or war.

Recent scholarship has highlighted the fact that the attempt to view Old Testament law as blanket rules which can be applied universally and at all times is fundamentally misguided. Law in ancient Israel, as in all societies, was a dynamic process, as legislators tried to find the 'best life possible', and the legal collections, as we have them today, represent layers of development which took place over centuries.⁵ They were preserved, as Richard Bauckham puts it,

...to educate the people in the will of God for the whole of their life as his people, to create and develop the conscience of the community.⁶

Thus, the Biblical law collections cannot, and ought not, be taken as a monolithic code, valid at all times, for they were never intended to be such. The same is true of the parenthetic sections of the epistles to which Christians often look for rules for church life, for example with regard to the place of women, or church leadership. These passages have given generations of believers instruction on how to relate to one another in community, and how to run churches. For example, individuals and communities have felt obliged to obey the instructions for women to wear a head-covering in church (1 Corinthians 11:5-6), that only men should be teachers (1 Timothy 2:12), that church leaders are to marry only once (1 Timothy 3:2 NRSV), and so on. However, these instructions are also historically contingent, and represent the attempts of various writers to understand what it means to be followers of Jesus in particular historical times and social milieux.⁷

Thus, the universalising of Biblical law is fraught with difficulties, even impossible. If we try to make obedience to instruction our primary aim, problems will ensue. A telling example of this comes from the abolitionist debate. At the height of the anti-slavery campaign in the US, the Princetonian academics, led by Charles Hodge, saw the Bible as containing all the data one needed for life. But the absence of a direct instruction to abolish slavery

⁴ For a recent discussion of Paul's view of the law see Brian S. Rosner, *Paul and the Law: Keeping the Commandments of God* (Nottingham: IVP, 2013).

⁵ Terence E. Fretheim, 'Law in the Service of Life: Dynamic Understanding of Law in Deuteronomy' in *A God So Near: Essays in Old Testament Theology in honor of Patrick D. Miller* (eds.) Brent A. Strawn & Nancy R. Bowen (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2003), pp. 183-200.

⁶ Richard Bauckham, *The Bible in Politics* (London: SPCK 1989), p. 26.

⁷ See for example Margaret Y. MacDonald, *The Pauline Churches; a Socio-Historical study of Institutionalization in the Pauline and Deutero-Pauline Writings* (Cambridge: CUP, 1988); Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), pp. 66-72.

led them to conclude that abolitionism must be sin – despite the fact that they knew that slavery was probably contrary to the will of God. The result was that they contributed to the prolonging slavery, rather than working towards justice and the alleviation of suffering.⁸

Looking for principles

Given the difficulties in the contemporary application of many Biblical laws and instructions, many Christians look to the Bible to provide principles by which to live. For example, in an attempt to preserve the legal passages as relevant for today, Craig Blomberg et al suggest a method known as the ‘ladder of abstraction’. According to this theory, readers of the Bible should try to abstract principles from those laws which seem irrelevant or impracticable to us today. As an example, they propose that while we do not need to obey the instructions in Leviticus 3 about sacrificing an animal (because Jesus has fulfilled all the requirements of the law), we can learn principles regarding the ‘costliness and purity demanded by these laws’.⁹ There is no doubt that this approach promotes a respectful understanding of the laws which seem obscure to us today, however there are problems here too.¹⁰ What does ‘costliness and purity’ mean in our age? Moreover, at what stage does a principle become a rule, and when ought that principle to be re-examined? We still have to exercise discernment as to when these principles apply and when they do not. For example, I might have a strong principle of being honest in my dealings with people. But supposing I put someone’s life at risk by strict adherence to this principle? Is my principle of honesty more important than someone else’s life? Principles, like rules, can become tyrannical, and their proponents, just as much as those who cling to the law, can become rigid and egotistic and self-serving.

There are, then, problems with the idea that to be under the authority of Scripture means to look to it solely for rules and principles for application in our daily lives. The problem is not only that the Biblical material is not straightforward, but also that obedience to rules and principles is an inadequate basis for our everyday lives.

⁸ See David Torbett, *Theology and Slavery: Charles Hodge and Horace Bushnell* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2006); Molly Oshatz, *Slavery & Sin: The Fight against Slavery and the Rise of Liberal Protestantism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁹ William W Klein, Craig Blomberg, Robert L. Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2003); See further Walter C. Kaiser, *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), pp. 477-504 (491); cf. Daniel J. Hays, ‘Applying the Old Testament Law Today’ *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158 (2001), pp. 21-35.

¹⁰ See Waldemar Jantzen, *Old Testament Ethics: A Paradigmatic Approach* (Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994).

The Bible of course, does not consist solely of legal materials, but the reader who looks for direct instruction from it can subconsciously treat it as if it does, but this leads to the same problems we have identified with the law. The problem is where to see instruction, and how and when to apply it. For example, it is entirely reasonable to heed the warning of the prophets that we should seek justice and stand up for the poor, and to act on this. But not all Scripture is universalisable in this way. We know (or should know), for instance, that no Christian should think it a good idea to take the children of our enemies and ‘dash them against a rock’ (Psalm 137:9). Clearly more is required for ethical living than a desire to obey the instructions we find, or think we find, in Scripture.

Agape love – the key to the Scriptures?

The problem of how to live ‘under the authority of Scripture’ is not a new one, of course, and that it was troublesome in Jesus’ time is illustrated in the tradition recorded in the gospels in which he is asked which of the commandments is the greatest (Mark 12:28-34; Matthew 22:34-40; Luke 10:25-28). Jesus replies:

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Matthew 22:37-38).

Jesus’ straightforward answer seems to give us a solution to the problem of how to live by the Scriptures. We might even be tempted to say that he gives us a principle by which to live. If we want to live lives pleasing to God, and live according to the Scriptures, we must make loving God our priority, and love our neighbour too. Jesus’ words have also suggested to many that we should apply the same standard to our interpretation of Scripture, an idea which dates back to Augustine.

Whoever, then, thinks that he understands the Holy Scriptures, or any part of them, but puts such an interpretation upon them as does not tend to build up this twofold love of God and our neighbour, does not yet understand them as he ought. If, on the other hand, a man draws a meaning from them that may be used for the building up of love, even though he does not happen upon the precise meaning which the author whom he reads intended to express in that place, his error is not pernicious, and he is wholly clear from the charge of deception.¹¹

There is much to be said for this idea of a ‘hermeneutic of love’. It can help prevent us from adopting the kind of compassion-less worldview to

¹¹ *On Christian Doctrine* 1:36.

which the Princetonian hermeneutic was prone. It can also help us avoid an individualistic self-referential interpretation of Scripture which seeks only to hear what the Bible has to say for one's self rather than for others. It can enable us to make sense of the confusing and sometimes conflicting statutes and the Bible's sometimes violent imagery. These texts must be gauged against the standard of agape love and discounted as a basis for moral guidance if they do not measure up to it. Thus, for example, the laws which uphold slavery are to be abandoned, as are those which advocate the harsh punishment of sexual misdemeanour. Since love entails caring for our neighbour, our interpretation of Scripture must always be cognisant of its effect on others. For these reasons and more, the idea of a hermeneutic of love has been experiencing something of a revival in recent years.¹² However, while it is deeply attractive, is actually fraught with difficulties.

In the first place, there is the question of what love actually means.¹³ Of course, there are the demands of Scripture to feed the poor, care for the sick, practise hospitality, look after widows. There is also the 'Golden Rule' which bids us to do unto others as we would have them do unto us (Matthew 7:12). We are to be 'other-centred', rather than self-centred. However, this is not as straightforward as might at first appear. Mental illness or disability may limit my capacity to exercise compassion or forgiveness, for example. Personal and cultural differences, or even simple misunderstandings, may make it very difficult to fulfil the Golden Rule. My neighbour may not think that my 'loving' actions are loving at all. Further, Jesus' demand for agape love includes that we should love strangers, and even our enemies.¹⁴ But how does this play out in practice? It is one thing to be able to care for someone who has the same motivations and interests as ourselves, but how are we to love those who wish us harm? We may want to practise hospitality, for instance, but are we to give freedom to our enemies to hurt us and our families?¹⁵

Questions such as these remind us how difficult it is to follow a principle of agape love. The problem is amply illustrated in Jesus' own teaching. On the one hand he preaches mercy, while on the other he makes some very 'strenuous commands', for example, with regard to divorce

¹² Patrick Nullens, 'Theologia caritatis and the Moral Authority of Scripture; Approaching 2 Timothy 3:16-17 with a hermeneutic of love' *European Journal of Theology* 22 (2013), pp. 38-49; Jeff B. Pool, 'No Entrance into truth except through love: contributions from Augustine of Hippo to a contemporary Christian Hermeneutic of Love' *Review and Expositor* 101 (2004), pp. 628-666.

¹³ See for example C.A. Boyd (ed.), *Visions of Agape: Problems and Possibilities in Human and Divine Love* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008).

¹⁴ Richard A. Burridge, *Imitating Jesus: An Inclusive Approach to New Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), pp. 50ff; cf. A.E. Harvey, *Strenuous Commands: The Ethics of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1990).

¹⁵ For discussions of the problems of agape Werner G. Jeanrond, *A Theology of Love* (London: T&T Clark, 2010); Gene H. Outka, *Agape an Ethical Analysis* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1972).

(Matthew 5:31). Which should we follow? As Burridge suggests, imitating Jesus means finding a balance between the two.¹⁶ But, as the history of the church shows, we are singularly poor at finding that balance.

For various reasons – flawed judgement, differing worldviews, sinful motives – it seems that human beings have an imperfect grasp of what agape love actually means, and hence an limited ability to carry out its demands. This is not to deny that as Christians we have been transformed by love or that the Holy Spirit is not working to produce love within us. It is, however, to acknowledge that in the ‘now and not yet’ our transformation is as yet incomplete, and that we cannot assume that we will have a full understanding of love in this present age.

In the light of all this it is perhaps surprising that the Bible does not tell us *how* to overcome these difficulties in concrete, prescriptive terms. There are, however, good reasons for this. In the first place, the Biblical documents reflect the culture and understanding of their own times. As Werner Jeanrond notes,

The Bible does not contain any pure or original passage on love to which we could return for any timeless or unambiguous understanding of love. Both the Shema Israel in Deuteronomy 4:4-6 and the understanding of God as love in 1 John 4 are embedded in concrete community contexts, religious concerns and group-identity issues.¹⁷

The Biblical writers’ horizons and experience, like those of any human being, are limited. Hence, they can only contribute to an understanding of what it means to love – they cannot give a comprehensive account.

Second, it would be contradictory to prescribe how to love. As Vanstone notes, love and freedom go hand in hand; love and control must be mutually exclusive. God’s people must be able to respond to him with their own free expressions of love, however flawed these expressions might be.¹⁸

Third, love cannot be prescribed because it is an attitude rather than an action.¹⁹ It is an orientation which means that we have certain characteristics which will determine the nature of our actions. Thus, we can only describe what a loving disposition looks like, as Paul does in 1 Corinthians 13. ‘Love’ he says, is

...patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice

¹⁶ Burridge, *Imitating Jesus*, p. 76.

¹⁷ Jeanrond, *Theology of Love*, p. 40.

¹⁸ W.H. Vanstone, *Love’s Endeavour, Love’s Expense: The Response of Being to the Love of God* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1977).

¹⁹ Erich Fromm, *The Art of Loving* (New York: Harper & Row, 1956).

in wrong doing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends (1 Corinthians 13:4-8).

While we may exhibit these attributes in our day to day life, and act lovingly towards our neighbour, we can only know in part, seeing only “in a mirror, dimly” (1 Cor 13:9). It is only at the end times that we will come to understand the love which never ends. Thus, as Thiselton says, the love described here must be

...profoundly *christological*, for the *cross* is the paradigm case of the act of *will* and *stance* which *places welfare of others above the interest of the self*.²⁰

If we want to know what it is to be loving, then, we must look to the life and death of Jesus Christ as portrayed in the gospels. Only he is able to find the balance between the strenuous commands and the need for mercy. The only way we can understand love in all its fullness is to look at Christ himself.

The insistence of Scripture that love can only be seen in Christ means that love cannot be reduced to a principle to guide our lives.²¹ Rather, love can only be learned from a dynamic relationship with Christ, from whom we learn to love others. If we detach it from that personal relationship, and treat it as a principle to be followed, obedience to the command to love could easily slip into a concern for correct behaviour, and hence become self-serving, rather than focussed on the needs of others.

For the same reasons, a ‘hermeneutic of love’ is inadequate for our understanding of the Scriptures.²² Because of our imperfect understanding of love, we are ill-equipped to adopt such a hermeneutic. It is right, of course, to read the Bible with an attitude of love which desires the welfare of others, and ‘does not insist on its own way’ (1 Corinthians 13:4). But we so readily and unconsciously read our own desires and concerns into Scripture, all the while imagining that we can have a complete, objective, grasp of the truth. As the embodiment of love, and the fulfilment of the law (Matthew 5:17), only Jesus can exercise a perfect hermeneutic of love.

Our hermeneutic, therefore, should be Christological. It is thus that we are enabled to live lives which are pleasing to God. Of course, this does not mean that law and parenesis should be ignored altogether, or that we should desist trying to find Biblical principles to guide us, but it does mean that we view them in the light of our relationship with Jesus Christ. Prayerfully, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we try to discern how Biblical

²⁰ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), p. 1035.

²¹ Stanley Hauerwas, *Vision and Virtue* (Notre Dame: Fides, 1974), p. 120. See further, Charles R. Pinches, *Theology and Action: After Theory in Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), p. 52; Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* (ed. Eberhard Bethge) (London: SCM, 1971), pp. 32-37.

²² Pace Nullens, ‘Theologia Caritatis’, p. 45.

instruction is to be applied in our lives today. For, as Paul says in his letter to the Galatians, we now live in the freedom of the holy Spirit, and having come of age, no longer need a tutor (*paedagōgos*) to tell us what to do (Galatians 4:1-7).²³

Wisdom and the Bible

Neither life, nor for that matter the Bible, can be reduced to law observance or to a matter of principle, even when (or perhaps more accurately, precisely because) our understanding is transformed by a relationship with Christ. Nevertheless, Christians live in community with other believers in the ambiguities and tensions of the ‘now and not yet’. Situations and dilemmas pose problems which require discernment and guidance. These may or not be moral in nature. They may concern important life decisions such as what career to choose or whether or not to marry. They may involve questions such as how to reconcile the reality of suffering with our belief in a loving God. In the letter of James, believers are faced with the problem of how to persevere in the face of persecution, and in the light of this, the author urges his readers to pray for wisdom (James 1:2-8). So, too, as Jesus sends his disciples out he instructs them to be ‘wise as serpents and innocent as doves’ when they encounter troubles and difficulties in the course of their mission (Matthew 10:16). But what does ‘wisdom’ mean, and what part does it play in the life of the believer? The Bible itself helps us to answer this question. Besides the law, parenesis and prophetic literature, the canon of Scripture contains a large collection of stories, poetry, and discourses which represent centuries of trying to understand what it means to be in relationship with God and other people. In this section we will consider what these writings might have to say to the Christian who wishes to live ‘under the authority of Scripture.’

The most obvious place to start is the Old Testament wisdom literature. This is usually understood to comprise Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Job, and certain Psalms (e.g. Psalms 1; 32; 34; 37; 49; 73; 78; 91; 112; 127; 128).²⁴ The book of Proverbs gives advice and examples of moral skill for living. Its aphoristic sayings contain warnings against prizing wealth, against pursuing only short-term pleasure, against the dangers of promiscuity and adultery, against foolish talk and gossip. We are advised to cultivate qualities such as loyalty and faithfulness and truthfulness (e.g. Proverbs 3:3). The wise are those who have learned that actions have consequences – in other

²³ On the relationship between the parenetic section of Galatians and Paul’s teaching on freedom in the spirit see John M.G. Barclay, *Obeying the Truth: Paul’s Ethics in Galatians* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988).

²⁴ On wisdom literature see David Penchansky, *Understanding Wisdom Literature: Conflict and Dissonance in the Hebrew Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012); Alistair Hunter, *Wisdom Literature* (London: SCM, 2006).

words, they learn from experience (26:28). They also know that they can look to the created order to know how to live, for wisdom is essential to the well-ordered running of the world. For example, lessons about industriousness can be learned from observing ants as they work (6:6-11). So important is this idea that wisdom becomes poetically personified as 'Lady Wisdom', who was present at the beginning of creation (8:22-31) and thus has an intimate knowledge of God's great creative power. However, it is our responsibility to be willing to learn, and if we are not, we are following the opposite poetic figure – folly (9:13-18).²⁵

The Old Testament compilers knew that wisdom does not only consist in heeding advice. As the books of Job and Ecclesiastes show, wisdom also entails asking questions, wrestling with the reality of suffering and uncertainty in the world. Being wise means realising that we will never fully understand either the world, or the God who created it. We may be instructed to 'get wisdom, get insight' (Proverbs 4:5), but this includes knowing our human limitations. Indeed, wisdom also consists in *not* knowing. Crenshaw remarks:

the most important legacy of wisdom is the capacity to recognise the limits imposed on human reason and to face reality honestly, submitting every claim about knowledge to this severe judgement.²⁶

Wisdom therefore means humility rather than arrogance, and honest searching rather than imposing one's views on others. And if, as Tremper Longman suggests, Lady Wisdom should be seen as equated with God himself, human beings cannot and will not ever have all the wisdom and knowledge that belong to Him.²⁷

Besides the documents commonly designated as wisdom literature, Old Testament narratives illustrate the values which are encapsulated in the aphoristic sayings of Proverbs and elsewhere. By recounting the stories of the patriarchs, the authors and compilers of the Pentateuch portray lives which are congruent (or otherwise) with the covenant with Yahweh. For example, the story of Joseph's experiences and his forgiveness of his brothers are examples to be learned from and followed. In Judges, warnings are given as to the kind of mayhem which will occur when Yahweh is not honoured by rulers. In the story of Ruth, truth and loyalty are prized, as well

²⁵ On the significance of personification of wisdom as feminine, see Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet: Critical Issues in Feminist Christology* (London: SCM, 1994).

²⁶ James L. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction* (London: SCM, 1981), p. 191, see further R.W.L. Moberley, 'Solomon and Job: Divine Wisdom in Human Life' in (ed.) Stephen C. Barton *Where Shall Wisdom Be Found? Wisdom in the Bible, the Church and the Contemporary World* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), pp. 3-17.

²⁷ Tremper Longman III, *Proverbs* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006).

as shrewd thinking. Through such stories communities pass on ethical values from generation to generation.²⁸

Wisdom in the Old Testament, then, has to do with character - the attitudes and attributes which inform the way we live our lives.²⁹ The same is true in the New Testament. For the epistle of James, which has been described as 'a wisdom document in parenetic style', wisdom is a gift from God which will engender attitudes quite different from the envy and selfish ambition which produce disorder and wickedness (James 3:13-18).³⁰

But wisdom, like love, is never really defined. In the gospels, of course, we have certain pointers as to its nature. Jesus is the recipient of divine wisdom (Matthew 11:25-7; Luke 11:49), and teaches using aphorisms and by telling stories.³¹ His followers are challenged to respond to the kingdom wisely (e.g. Matthew 7:24-27; 25:1-13).³² But when they ask how this should be done, Jesus often responds with parables, whose open-ended nature means that the hearer must be prepared for the fact that there may be more than one interpretation.³³ They require discernment, an ability to see beyond the immediately obvious, and a willingness to let go of cherished ideas.³⁴

In the end, wisdom is to be found mainly by observing the fruits of wise living – specifically in the life of Jesus himself (Matthew 11:16-19). Indeed, Jesus is presented as the personification of wisdom. In the Johannine prologue, as the *logos* who was pre-existent with God and present at the creation of the world (John 1:3), Jesus becomes 'the unique wisdom-word of God'.³⁵ Paul echoes the Old Testament wisdom traditions: all things are said to exist through Christ (1Corinthians 8:6 cf Proverbs 8:27-30). For the writer to the Colossians, Christ is the first born of all creation and 'all things have been created through him and for him' (Colossians 1:16).

Paul develops the idea of wisdom further. In his effort to steer the Corinthians away from the attractions of impressive rhetoric (1 Corinthians 1:17), he explores the idea that Christ Jesus is the wisdom of God (1:30). He insists that wisdom is to be found in Christ crucified, in his ignominious

²⁸ See, for example, Gordon J. Wenham, *Story as Torah: Reading the Old Testament Ethically* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000).

²⁹ See, for example, M.V Fox, 'Ideas of wisdom in Proverbs 1-9' *JBL* 116 (1997), pp. 613-33.

³⁰ H.G. Conzelmann in (eds). Keith R. Crim, Lloyd R. Bailey & Victor P. Furnish, *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Supplementary Volume* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1977), p. 960.

³¹ Graham Stanton, 'Message and Miracles' in *The Cambridge Companion to Jesus* (ed.) Markus Bockmuehl (Cambridge: CUP, 2001), pp. 56-71.

³² On wisdom in the gospels see Stephen C. Barton, 'Gospel Wisdom' in (ed.) Barton *Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?*, pp. 93-110.

³³ See Stephen J. Wright, *Hearing the Voice of Jesus: Studies in the Interpretation of Six Gospel Parables* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2000).

³⁴ Barton, 'Gospel Wisdom', p. 101.

³⁵ F.W. Burnett, 'Wisdom' in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (eds.) Joel B. Green, Soct McKinght & I. Howard Marshall (Nottingham; InterVarsity Press, 1992), pp. 873-77.

death on a cross, not in human eloquence which draws attention to the speaker rather than to Christ himself. For the believer, ‘cruciform wisdom’ demands that our wills be conformed to the one who gave up his life for us. Living wisely is therefore characterised by humble self-giving lives – ‘a volitional resolve in favour of God’s will over time’ (10).³⁶ But whereas in the Old Testament Qohelet and Job become frustrated and rather angry and want to protest loudly when they discover the fact that wisdom does not mean power in this world, for Paul it is a matter of rejoicing – for it is thus that God’s power is shown.³⁷ But cruciform wisdom is only for the mature. It is for those who can tolerate the fact that we can never fully understand this gift, and are willing for God’s power to be shown in their own weakness. For wisdom does not equal strength. The cruciform wisdom of which Paul speaks is one which will seem weak and foolish to the world, and is likely to be rejected (Mark 6:1-6; John 1:11).

Thus, in order to persevere in an uncertain and painful world, the Bible urges us to ‘get wisdom’.³⁸ In part, this is furnished by means of the wisdom tradition in which centuries of common sense and experience are passed down to us, but it also allows for questioning and wrestling with the reality of life. In the New Testament, Jesus the crucified Son of God, becomes the personification of wisdom. Ultimately, wisdom is to be learned by continually meditating on the story of Jesus and exploring its significance with others in order to become, in Hauerwas’ phrase, ‘communities of character’.³⁹

Conclusion

My conversation on a train disturbed me enough to make me revisit the question of what it means to be ‘Biblical’. In hindsight, I realise that while we were both (in all good conscience) trying to be faithful to our tradition and accord Scripture the central place in our decision making as individual disciples and in the church as a whole, we were also risking limiting its power and influence in our lives. As we have seen, to base our moral decision-making and mundane choices of everyday life on the Biblical laws and instructions is to misunderstand their nature and purpose, forcing us to try to universalise historically contingent material. Moreover, while the attempt to

³⁶ Paul K. Moser and Michael T. McFall, ‘Introduction: Philosophy and Cruciform Wisdom in Paul’ K. Moser and Michael T. McFall *The Wisdom of the Christian Faith* (NY: CUP, 2012), pp. 1-18 (10).

³⁷ Richard B. Hays, ‘Wisdom according to Paul’ in *Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?*, pp. 111-123.

³⁸ On the place of wisdom in the Christian life see David F. Ford, *Christian Wisdom: Desiring God and Learning in Love* (Cambridge: CUP, 2007).

³⁹ Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981). See further Alan Verhey, *Remembering Jesus: Christian Community, Scripture and the Moral Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

live solely by Biblical principles avoids the pitfalls of literalism, there are problems here too, for we are not absolved of the responsibility to discern which ones should be applied, and when.

Jesus' statement that love of God and neighbour sum up the law has suggested to some that a 'hermeneutic of love' is the best source of such discernment. However, even this is problematic, not least because of our faulty human understanding of the nature of agape love – for that we must look to Christ himself. Following Paul, we should perhaps have a more mature attitude towards Biblical instruction, looking to the Holy Spirit to enable us to be discerning as to its application today. It may be appropriate to think only in terms of rules when we are young, but the coming of Jesus means maturity and freedom. We may also be grateful that we have centuries of guidance, in the shape of stories, poetry and aphorisms, which help us live in the 'now and not yet', as well as permission to wrestle and question in the face of the difficulties which will inevitably arise.

It also seems to me now, that in our attempt to find instruction from the Bible, we were, in effect, hoping that it would tell us what to do. As mature Christians, we should have known better. For the Biblical literature itself resists the idea that Christian discipleship can be reduced to a matter of adherence to law or principle. Indeed, it tells us explicitly that we no longer need a *paedagōgos* and instead points us towards the centrality of love and the need for wisdom in our discipleship. And, lest we are tempted to reduce these also to principles, our attention is constantly diverted to the one who personifies them – Jesus Christ. Thus, our understanding of Christian discipleship, and indeed of Scripture, should be based on a dynamic relationship with Christ, through the Holy Spirit. And this means that we must be prepared to take risks, to make mistakes, to make ourselves exposed and vulnerable. It is hardly comfortable – but who said "cruciform wisdom" should be comfortable?

The trap into which I and my travelling companion fell is, I believe, one which poses a constant threat to all churches which try to hold to a 'high' view of Scripture. If we are not wary of it, we could rob ourselves of the richness and variety which characterise Scripture and compel ourselves to live static, diminished lives. The answer to our question therefore is a simple reminder. The role of Scripture is to point us to Jesus Christ himself, and it is our responsibility to allow it to do so. We should therefore resist the temptation to reduce it to a *paedagōgos* – no matter how secure that makes us feel, but be willing to trust in the One who is the fulfilment of the law, and the embodiment of love and wisdom. The question we must ask ourselves is – are we willing to take the risk?

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Book Review

Lina Andronovienė, *Transforming the Struggles of Tamars: Single Women and Baptist Communities*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, Imprint of Wipf and Stock, 2014, 300 pages paperback. ISBN 13: 978-1-62564-108-3

We tend to approach reading a new book with some pre-understanding of its subject area. Our intuition, guided by our previous reading, often happens to be right, not least because our selection of reading reflects our liking. My original understanding of the phenomenon of singleness was largely informed by dozens of books which I skimmed while shelving them as a book consultant on the bookshelves of the Fuller Seminary bookstore – a California based leading evangelical institution. Almost without exception those books were written for women in search of the right approach, or even technique, of securing a life-long partner. From that perspective, singleness is a transient and not particularly significant stage of life between adolescence and married life. Such an understanding is in line with the socially conservative evangelical theological focus on the family promoted by well known radio and TV broadcasters. Such a view of singleness will not resonate with the main concerns of this book. It belongs to the category of books that confronts the reader's prejudice and opens up a new perspective on the subject.

Whilst the book's clear focus is on the challenges faced by single women struggling to find their place in life, and particularly in the life of baptistic communities largely in Europe, it narrates a much more complex story of the faith community's relationship with single persons crossing denominational, gender, ethnic, regional and cultural boundaries. In this the title of the book promises less than the content delivers. The biblical metaphor and the deliberate address to the baptistic communities may suggest that the significance of this research is relevant only to certain sorts of Bible believing evangelicals. The term baptistic refers to a particular way of being a church, usually referred to as pneumatological, Free Church or believers' church – a tradition which follows in the footsteps of the Radical Reformation and forms a separate ecclesial stream emphasizing discipleship and communal belonging. However, the author's concerns go beyond the life within baptistic communities and the wider Christian tradition. The scope of the problem she addresses crosses the gender divide and extends beyond the experience of a particular denomination; it appeals to any faith community as well as to any thick expression of human living which is called to evaluate the space it allows for the flourishing of a single person's life.

In contemporary living where sex and pairing for sensual pleasure is a habitual way of looking at one's life fulfillment, the author asks: Can a deeper search for meaning be found elsewhere and with whom? In search for an answer Lithuanian scholar Dr. Lina Andronovienė – currently with the Scottish Baptist College in Glasgow – presents a skilfully interwoven tapestry of insights and enquiries. From popular culture's amusement with the mythology of romantic love of the nuclear family "living happily ever after" to the worn out pulpit clichés about God's plans for women being a happily married life; through some sharp but reductive feminist critical voices to the realistic assessment of a theology of happiness and friendship that takes into account suffering love, the kenotic aspect and communal character of human relationships leading to lasting and fulfilling friendships, in an almost encyclopedic breadth, it seems she has considered all possible aspects of the subject.

If her work had not been so clearly focused, the breadth of the themes and authors addressed might have produced a patchy treatment of the subject. Dr. Andronovienė is able to maintain the coherence of her work unchallenged. The structure and methodological grounding of her argument makes a creative contribution to convictional theologising. She proceeds from discerning the convictional grounds that have shaped the prevalent attitudes to singleness, to recognising and assessing the reasons for this formation, and finally to investigating critically possible routes of transformation by locating the issue of singleness in the holistic web of communal practices. Although primarily a work of theological ethics, this research also draws from several different disciplines, including cultural studies and sociology as well as intersections of science and theology.

The central concerns of the author are the challenge of involuntary singleness for women and the implications of disregarding this challenge for the professed, wished-for and lived-out theology of baptistic communities of faith. The emphasis of the research is on involuntary rather than voluntary singleness as experienced in the communities of baptistic persuasions, where faith commitments and moral perception limit the scope of desired social interactions. The author argues that by ignoring the issue these communities not only fail involuntarily single women, but also suffer a serious detriment to their own communal wellbeing and Christian witness. Turning the tide, it is proposed, requires a holistic way of life which draws together the personal, communal and visionary spheres of human existence.

Building upon her first hand observations and years of reflection on women's experience within baptistic tradition, Dr. Andronovienė creates a medium and vocabulary that enables her to relate that experience to a wider context.

The strength of her research work lies in the masterful blend of experience and profound understanding of the contextual language of virtues and practices appropriated by a particular form of faith expression. Even if one opts for *doing* theology, as most of these communities indeed do, rather than constructing models of how to do it, a convictional model or a map of the process for doing it is still needed. The book is a rewarding attempt to expand the convictional language and insights of the baptistic tradition to embrace advanced conceptual thinking on human nature and human relationships. The author's penetrating analysis provides an excellent example of a much needed link between the primary experiential theological life of faith communities and the well-developed conceptual framework of secondary academic theological discourse.

Dr. Andronovienè has accomplished a formidable task in this book. She has worked carefully on relating hard theological thinking with meaningful Christian experience of both an individual and an ecclesial community. While the premises of her work are contextually dependent, she has brought forth important issues for the whole Christian Church. I found her theological reflections refreshing and illuminating. One may not always agree with her assessment or follow her appropriation of a particular theological insight, but certainly her stimulating thought will leave indifferent no one concerned with the wellbeing of communities of faith.

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